

**AT THE
AGE
OF
EVE**

**BY
KATE
TRIMBLE
SHARBER**

57

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"I—I wondered who you were, too"

AT THE AGE OF EVE

By

KATE TRIMBLE SHARBER

Author of

THE ANNALS OF ANN

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY

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TO
ANN'S GOD-PARENTS
LILLIAN BYRN HARRISON
AND
JOHN TROTWOOD MOORE

2138079 !

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CHAPTER I

ANN

IN beginning this record I find that it is no easy matter to feel at home with a clean, blank journal. The possibilities of these spotless pages seem to oppress me, and I am weighted down with the idea that my opening sentences ought to sound brilliant and promising.

With this thought I have started three or four entries on scraps of paper lying here about my desk, but I find that not one of them is the kind of thing which would make you bend over close and knit your brows, thinking you had picked up Plato by mistake.

No matter what lofty sentiments I have in my mind you can always hear the swish of petticoats through my paragraphs and I regret this, for all my life I have longed to write something that would

sound like George Eliot. In the world of books she is my idol—my lady idol, I mean, for of course the dearest idols of all are the poets, and they are always men.

“George Eliot is my lady idol and my man one, too,” some one said to me once when I mentioned my preference, and this exactly expresses it. When you read what she has written you never stop to think whether it was written by a man or by a woman. Even in these days the women who write anything worth reading do it so cleverly that you never for a moment suspect they clean out their fountain-pen with a hair-pin.

How *do* they manage it, I wonder, when one adjective too many would brand them as a female?

Yet if the sex does not show in the writing, the writing always shows in the sex. If the most masculine man on earth takes a notion to become a writer his friends all begin strange mutterings behind his back, and before long some one has whispered “Sissy.” Ah, and if a woman by any chance decides to use her pen a while, so her tongue can rest, her associates are quick to pronounce that she has grown so *masculine* since she started this writing business! Verily the pen is mightier than the sword

if it can influence sex in a manner that would turn a court physician green with envy.

I should be willing to cut off my hair and call myself George, Henry or even Sam, if I thought it would help me to be a great writer, for, in my soul, I have always longed to write something so great and unfeminine that it would not harm a Trappist monk.

Still, the setting forth of these wishes of mine does not help me to get started comfortably on this new record. Do you notice that I call it a *record*, and not a diary? This is because I expect to write in it only occasionally—skim the cream of events, as it were, instead of boring you with the details of the daily milking.

If it were January first, now, I could think up any number of inspiring New Year sentiments to get started off with; sermons based on the three R's to be met with most often at this season—Regrets, Resolves and Reforms. Sometimes there is a fourth R which follows quickly on the heels of these—Returns, to the old habits.

Here it is, though, midsummer; and I am sure it would seem to any one looking on that I have no visible means of support for any kind of journal,

tucked away as I am in this little town where a girl has not inspiration enough to keep her shirt-waist pulled down in the back.

So, with this remark about my shirt-waist, I put aside my longing to write something like George Eliot and make a frank acknowledgment of my skirts. Right glad I ought to be that I have them, too, for I believe that if data were plentiful on the subject we should find that the "mantle of charity" was originally a skirt. "Just like a fool woman," people say leniently, and are willing to let it pass.

I am a girl, then, as you will readily gather from the foregoing, simply by putting one and one together—the shirt-waist and the skirt. I live near a little country town, and am vastly dissatisfied with the cramped stage and meager audience, else why should I be keeping a journal? A journal is not nearly so much a book in which you tell what you do as one in which you tell what you would like to do.

Pray do not imagine from the above that I am longing for a crowded, noisy stage, with lights glittering over tinsel. No, I am not that kind of girl. I like a play of few actors, but where the things happening make *the veins of the neck* stand out!

In admitting that I do not love the village near which I live I know I run the risk of being considered ill-natured. It would be sweeter of me to make it out a cheery little Cranford of a place, where the tea-kettle steams cozily and drowsy tinklings lull the distant folds. These things do happen, after a modern, American fashion; and the people who own the tea-kettles and the folds are the same as other people all over the world. I have no quarrel with them. Still, I am forced to admit that time hangs so heavy on my hands I wash my hair every other day. Have you ever noticed how often a woman, who has nothing better to do, will wash her hair?

Here, then, is a brief description of the village, with malice toward none, although at times it may sound malicious:

The surrounding country is so beautiful that if you are coming into the town on the train you are ill-prepared for the hideous little railway station, which is the first shock you receive. The floor of this "depot" is dirtier than anything else on earth could be, save the post-office floor, and there is a rusty little stove in the middle of the room close to the box of sand, around which tobacco juice is be-

ing eternally spit, spat, or whatever is the correct form of that unlovely verb.

Closè to the station are the livery stables, but we shall pass by as quickly as possible; and farther up the street is the Racket Store. Sometimes this place has a very handsome clerk from the city; it is then a busy market. Across the street from the hotel is the millinery establishment, and, if you are on good terms with the milliner, she invites you to come and sit at her front window some mornings just after the eleven-o'clock train has come, so you can get a good view of the interesting drummers.

Most of the local attractions in the way of young men are sturdy farmers, who, like June-bugs, appear for only a few months every summer. The others, dry goods clerks, bookkeepers and professional whittlers, usually line up on the back benches at church on Sunday evenings and cause mild panics in the breasts of the unescorted girls present, whose hearts palpitate painfully during the benediction.

But here I have set forth the doings of Sunday evening before mentioning the events of the afternoon, which, while not exciting, are in a way more characteristic than those of any other time. If the day is fine the country roads blossom forth at irregu-

lar intervals with young couples out driving or walking, close to Nature's heart, yet caring far less for her beauties than for the sight of each other, which, after all, is nature. If there is any one in the town sick enough for his neighbors to be really concerned about him, on Sunday afternoon the sick one's house is swarming with a crowd sufficient to furnish forth a funeral. This is not *called* "profaning the Sabbath," but it ought to be.

On rainy days, or even on fine ones, the inhabitants who are too old to be a-lovering usually sit around and go to sleep in their chairs, with their mouths wide open. Besides being ungraceful, this is an invitation to tonsillitis. Dear me! I have misspelled that word again, for Doctor Osler says there are two l's in it, and I am sure there are—in the kind I had last Christmas!

Somewhere in the early fall, about the time for green tomatoes to be made up into pickle, there is the excitement of seeing the new public school teachers file into town, and if you happen to be buying a hat at the millinery store any time within the next few weeks you can hear a complete description of each teacher. One paints her face until it's mottled, you are told; another has blond hair

and brunette eyebrows, so she must have been on the stage; a third evidently has seen "better days," for she wears a diamond ring on her little finger! There is only *one* more astonishing thing than the way the women of the village talk about these teachers, and that is the way the men marry them!

Again I find that I have anticipated and reached the autumn before I have finished with the summer, in the very hottest part of which, usually August, comes an "evangelist" to hold a protracted meeting. The sound of words always meant so much to me when I was a child, and when I first heard that word, evangelist, I pictured a great, radiant figure, with spreading white wings growing out from a somber suit of black clothes, and holding to his lips a long, graceful trumpet. Naturally, this was some time ago, when I was quite young, and wanted to be good, so that when I died I could go to heaven, where my chief delight was going to be tending a garden full of silver bells and cockle-shells and pretty maids all in a row. Oh, those silver bells! In point of beauty they had no rivals in my childish imagination, except Cinderella's glass slippers and Aaron's golden calf! A lovely heaven it was going to be, of light pastel shades, and a great way off

from God! You see I was brought up in such an orthodox atmosphere that I imagined God was like the principal of a school I once attended, always looking out for offenders with a rod up his sleeve.

It was a distinct disappointment to me when I found that an evangelist is like any ordinary preacher, except that he perspires more. Sometimes he is sensational and preaches about lace yokes and dancing; and on Sunday afternoon holds a meeting for men only, where he tells them what a terribly bad man *he* used to be! Again he is "burdened" with the souls of the whole congregation and preaches hell and damnation in a voice that sounds like pitchforks clanging against iron chains. Now, city preachers seldom do anything like this. In the city pulpits, of recent years, hell is like smallpox; it is still *there*, but in a much milder form.

During the revivals there are always one or more abusive sermons directed at the other churches of the town, and, of course, the Episcopalians are ever in a class with "the Turk and the comet." Catholics are unmentionable.

This usually causes much "hard feeling" among the good wives of the town, at an inconvenient time, too, for the season for swapping sweet peach pickle

recipes is close at hand. The only people who can maintain a placid spirit during these revivals are those who stay away, and I usually try this plan, unless the evangelist happens to be young and good-looking.

Young and good-looking, ay, there's the rub! Herein is my lack of material for an interesting journal, so long as I stay here at home. Notwithstanding these barriers, Cousin Eunice, who was the instigator of my childhood's diary, has again suggested that I keep a book here by me to "tell off" to occasionally when I feel the need of a mental clearing-house. She says a journal has two points of advantage over the bosom friend a girl of my age usually has; one is, that you can shut it up when you want to go to sleep at night, and the other is that you can burn it when you grow ashamed of the secrets it contains, neither of which you can do to your bosom friend, no matter how badly you may wish to.

The diary which I kept for several years while I was at the gawky age was intended to be secreted between two pieces of board in the attic and discovered by my grandchildren amid tumultuous applause, years hence. But I am far too grown-up

for these grandchildren now. The knowledge of my years is ever with me, a sort of binding torment, like an armhole that is too tight, so I shall have to leave the little dears behind, with the fairies and the freckles that I have long since outgrown. They, or the thought of them, used to make me feel that I was on actual speaking terms with my other diary, but perhaps after a while, I may feel on the same terms with you, even without their presence.

In the first place, as a reason for this book's being, I have always liked the notion of keeping a written account of my thoughts and feelings, especially of my feelings, for they are usually all jumbled up in my mind, like ribbons on a remnant counter, but after I have set them down in black and white where I can stand off and look at them they are no more complicated than sardines in a box. Another reason is that in the diaries, correspondence and love-letters of interesting people (great people, I mean) which I have read, I have found there is a sort of interest which is lacking in their stiff-standing-collar and high-heeled-shoes productions. In this class I have read Amiel and Sam Pepys, and the love-letters of Sophie Dorothea, poor dear! How her portrait must have lied! No

woman with that much fat on her neck could really love! I adore Amiel and am fond of Pepys, although I wish he had left out about a ton of that venison pasty which his "she-cozen" was usually preparing for his entertainment. It always gets in your line of vision, somehow, whenever you are craning your neck to catch a glimpse of that naughty, but nice Charlie Stuart!

Then there was a girl in *Pendennis* who kept a book of heart-outpourings and called it "Mes Larmes." And my Lord Byron's dear friend, Lady Blessington, called hers "My Night Book."

! Well, mine is not going to be a night book, for that is not my favorite time for mental surveying. I am still a regular lizard in my love for the sunshine, and, if the prospect sounds alluring, I'll promise that much of this book shall be written in the clear light of day. A good part of my other diary was written up in the old pear tree by the orchard gate, but now I am grown up, so, of course—

"Mes Larmes" would be even worse for a title than the one I have just mentioned. Some tears will, of course, be mixed in to make the rainbows of happiness shine through, but I fancy that mine will be principally a record of work and play. Work

that is play and play that is work, mother says, as I sit on the shady porch in the mornings working flowers on my shirt-waist front, and spend the afternoons playing tennis in the hot sun. Work and play, then, for the present ; later, maybe, smiles and sighs ; while a long, long way in the future, perhaps on the last few pages, there *may* be—shall I say it? No, I am not well enough acquainted with you yet.

Although I have kept back this one little thought from you in the above, I promise that in the narration of all things which have actually happened this journal is going to be unexpurgated! First, I love truth ; and I think that a whole truth is nearly always better than a half. For instance, d—n in print always looked worse to me than damn. Then, in the diaries and love-letters I have mentioned above, I have often found that at the very places where matters were getting *so* interesting you straighten up somewhat and begin to breathe very softly, the narrative breaks suddenly into a row of beastly little dots—and you are left to imagine what you will! Maybe the truth would not have been half so bad as your imaginings—maybe it would have been much worse. It all depends upon the condition of your circulation!

For my part, I like a book to tell the whole truth about what it starts out to tell; yet this does not mean that every detail is to be described, even to setting forth whether the heroine wears hose-supporters or round garters. Now, in case this journal *should* be secreted in the attic and found years hence by a mixed audience which is inclined to take offense at my mention of garters, I shall say simply, "Evil to him who evil thinketh."

So I am going to have you for my confidential friend and adviser. I say adviser advisedly, for I know of nothing which preaches a better sermon sometimes than for a person to look over certain back pages of his diary; especially *her* diary.

When I am wicked enough to make your leaves curl up in horror, all you can do is to listen to my story and not look at me as if you thought I needed the prayers of the congregation. People who pray don't talk about it anyway! And, if by chance, my right hand should do something handsome that it is fairly itching to tell about we can recite it all to you, knowing that you will never let it come to the ears of my left hand.

Good I may occasionally be; wicked I shall certainly be, for are not we all born in iniquity? But I

hope that in after years when I read over these pages I shall not discover that it takes a sextant, a compass and an alarm clock to find out where my heart is!

CHAPTER II

THE NEW NEIGHBORS

"**Y**OU mus' be mighty clean, or mighty dirty, *one*," Mammy Lou called out to me this morning as she looked up from the kitchen door and espied me at the bath-room window with my robe wrapped around me toga-fashion.

"Oh, excuse *me*," she continued with exaggerated politeness after a moment in which I did not speak. "Of course you ain't to be spoke to when you're breathin' like a heathen!"

I finished the prescribed number of breaths laid down in the rules for Yogi breathing, which I am trying just now because I am so tired of breathing the same old way, then looked down at mammy.

"A girl who can take a cold bath every morning and bait a fish-hook can take care of herself in this life!" I answered. "You ought to be proud of my courage."

"'Tain't no Christian notion for no girl to be wantin' to take care of herself," she began to argue,

but rather than get into a debate and be routed, as she sometimes is, she suddenly assumed an air of excitement and cried: "Listen! Wasn't that the thing hollerin'?"

"The thing" here referred to is the new inter-urban line which now runs past our house, much to the chagrin of Mammy Lou, who calls it the "interruption line," because it is "always drappin' somebody off here right in the midst o' dinner time, when there ain't nothin' lef' but backs and wings."

This very disconcerting thing has happened so many times that mother found she would have to carry a full line of emergency tins in her pantry, all bearing on their labels the comforting assurance that they could be served hot in three minutes. These were ever small consolation to Mammy Lou, however, and she always serves them with as much humiliation as if the "Yankee beans" and "het-over peas" were the proverbial dinner of herbs.

This morning, though, the lid was shut fast on the tinned diet department and there was as much beautiful fried chicken sizzling drowsily on the back of the stove as northern people always give us Southerners credit for having. The best white and gold china was on the table, and a tall vase of Paul

Neron roses on the mantelpiece, hiding father's bottle of rheumatism cure.

At mammy's suggestion that she heard the "thing" hollering I had thrown on my clothes without waiting to wipe all the water out of my ears, and had run down-stairs to see if mother needed me to pin her collar down in the back, for I knew she would be wanting to look her best this morning. We were all a little excited (things so seldom happen here) and I noticed that father was using his most rheumatic hand and arm every few minutes to take his watch out of his pocket; yet he forgot to frown.

The Claybornes were coming, Waterloo, Rufe and Cousin Eunice. We were feeling particularly anxious about the outcome of their visit, for mother and I had conspired together that a few political talks with Rufe *had* to cure father of his rheumatism. So we were watching every movement on his part with eager interest.

You must not imagine that we are unsympathetic with father when he actually has an attack. We rub him and put hot things to his shoulder, and I have actually gone so far as to let him explain the *primary plan* to me in words of one syllable that a child could understand, just to get his mind diverted.

Like most high-spirited men, when father does get down into the depths he tries to burrow clear on through to China. I wonder why this is? Possibly it is on the same principle that effervescent drugs are kept in blue bottles. I do not blame him, certainly, for rheumatism is enough to get on anybody's nerves. The poor man has to try as many different positions to get any ease sometimes as a worn-out alarm clock that will run only on a certain side. So the summer has been a hard one for us all, father waxing so melancholy here lately that if he has a gum-boil he gives us directions for his cremation.

It was during one of these outbursts of pessimism that father took it into his head to disfigure the landscape across the road from our house with a row of smart cottages, which were to rent for so much a month that they would prove a get-rich-quick scheme and so save us from the humiliation of being cared for by the Masons in our old age, which was another one of the notions in the train of rheumatic gloom.

Fortunately the first cottage cost so much more than it was worth that the project for the rest was abandoned; and, after it was duly insured, mother and I were secretly burning candles to our patron

saint for its incineration when it was rented to a family named Sullivan. This Sullivan family consists of a father who drinks, just a little, enough to keep him jolly all the time; a mother who is of such a despondent nature that you wish she would drink; a daughter who wears crimson silk gowns and jeweled combs to the post-office when she goes for her mail every morning, yet withal has more beaux than any other girl in the village, as is attested by the candy boxes piled piano-high in her parlor; and a maiden aunt, Miss Delia Badger, who dyes her hair. Now, this term, "maiden aunt," is usually employed to denote a condition of hopelessness, but you will understand from the dyed hair that, in this case, the condition is far from being hopeless—else why the dye?

The pristine blackness of Miss Delia's crown of glory was beginning to wear off, and in the stress of moving had not been replaced as soon as it should have been, so, on the day that I made her acquaintance, her hair displayed an iridescent sheen, shading from light tan to deep purple. This made me so angry with father for having built the cottage that I ran past him without a word of sympathy when I reached home, although he was sitting on the front

porch reading the paper and making horrible faces every time he had to move his arm.

The next day, which was the second after their moving, when I turned in at our gate after my morning tramp, I found that the Sullivans were presenting a much more homelike view from the front of their house, elaborate curtains showing at the parlor windows, and at the front door a white panel of lace, a most lifelike affair, representing Andrew Jackson mounted upon his fiery steed and lifting his high white hat to an imaginary, though evidently enthusiastic, throng.

"Now, I reckon you're satisfied," I exclaimed to father as I came into the house and found him cleaning his gun, one end of it resting on the piano, and a pile of greasy rags perilously close to my limp-backed copy of Gray's *Elegy*.

He quickly moved the gun and rags, but seeing that this offense was not the cause of my wrath, he meekly inquired: "What?"

Mother came in at this juncture and I explained to them my indignation over the Andrew Jackson.

"Jumping Jerusalem!" father said, thus admitting his horrified surprise, but after a moment he parried.

"It may be Napoleon, or Frederick the Great."

"What difference would that make?" I demanded. "A warrior has no place on a door-panel. Besides, it's 'Old Hickory.' I'd know that high white hat anywhere! Wasn't I born and *raised* in the shadow of it?"

"Dear me! But maybe you are mistaken," mother interposed gently. "It is quite a distance across the road—it may be a peculiar pattern of Batten—"

Before she had finished I darted up the steps and scrambled around in the bureau drawer for my opera-glasses.

"Take these out to the porch and *look*," I begged, as I came down again and found the two still facing each other with a quizzical smile. She carried out my suggestion and presently came back, still smiling.

"It's Andrew," she reported, reaching out for my opera-bag and slipping the glasses into it; "it's Andrew beyond a doubt; but, dearie, it *can't* outlast two washings."

This assurance comforted me somewhat every time I had to look at the military door-panel, but on cleaning days when the parlor curtains at the cottage were tucked up and I discerned the large, colored portrait of Mr. Roosevelt which smiled sunnily down

from the space above the mantelpiece there was no such consoling reflection.

About this time it was that I grew to know Neva, the daughter of the house. Her family called her "Nevar," most nasally, after the manner of "ordinary" people in the South; but I soon found qualities in her that made me forgive the silk gowns and jeweled combs, aye, even the Andrew Jackson.

In the first place I discovered that she entertained a most profound admiration for me, especially for my pronunciation and finger-nails. Of these she at once set about a frank imitation which later extended to things more impersonal. Once, after I had shown her my books and she had breathed a long, ecstatic sigh over the pictures in the library I found that the hero of San Juan was falling into disfavor as a parlor ornament. Neva had been especially impressed with a small oval portrait of my childhood's hero, Lord Byron, which mother had found once in a curio-shop in New Orleans and brought home to me.

"Who is he?" she asked, her eyes fixed admiringly on the matchless face. I explained to her.

"Is he dead?" she inquired softly.

"Alas, yes!"

"But it certainly is swell to have his picture here," she volunteered. "I reckon it's because he's dead that it is more quiet and elegant, somehow, than a president's picture. Now Mr. Roosevelt looks so horrid and *lively!*"

From this I gathered that the ex-president would sooner or later be deposed, but I was surprised to find that it had happened much sooner than I had expected, for the next time I visited the Sullivan home I found Mr. Roosevelt's jolly face gone; and in its stead the gentle features of William McKinley looked down on the candy-boxes and pink-flowered cuspidors. That he was dead was evidenced by the black border running mournfully around the print; and Neva called my attention to the fact as soon as I came into the room.

"You see he looks quieter than Roosevelt because he's dead," she elucidated, "although he isn't a poet! Papa said he'd buy me a poet the next time he went up to the city—and oh, a green leather copy of Gray's 'Prodigy!'—like yours!"

So, in trying to teach Neva the difference between presidents and poets, I have been able to enliven some of the dull days; and she is such a sweet little

thing at heart that, if she never gets the difference clear, my time is not ill-spent anyway.

But ah, *this* morning the Claybornes were coming! And we were all out at the gate in a twinkling when we finally did hear the shrill whistle of the car! The first sight of Waterloo's sparkling little face rewarded me for dressing while my ears were still wet. He had on a Buster Brown suit of white linen, with red anchors embroidered in their usual places, and a brave red badge setting forth his political inclinations. Father's lame hand had already reached out for him.

"Hello, Uncle Dan!" he said cordially, paying no attention to the feminine portion of the crowd. "Are you for it or 'ginst it?"

"I'm 'ginst it, too," father answered, drawing from his pocket a similar badge.

"That's right! Now show me the mules!"

He and father led the way up the walk, followed by the rest of us, with Grapefruit, escorted by a hilarious Lares and Penates, bringing up the rear.

Grapefruit, be it known, is Waterloo's nurse, or, more properly speaking, is a kind of jester to His Majesty. Her genuine name is Gertrude, but she

came to him when he was at such a tender age that he corrupted it to Grapefruit, and Rufe says that if he had named her Fragrant Pomegranate Vine it would not be any too good for her. She is an ethereal little darky with wonderful powers of diversion. Cousin Eunice tells about how she found her out in the side yard playing with Waterloo one May morning long ago, and how his soul so clave unto her soul that he refused to give her up.

Automobiles, red wagons, fire-engines, boxes of candy—all were suggested in vain. "I want my little Grapefruit," he tearfully insisted, over and over again, until the attractive one modestly announced that she might be engaged to stay and amuse him by the week for "seventy-five or fifty cents, or I'll stay for nothing if you'll let me play on the piano."

Cousin Eunice joyfully agreed to the highest figure asked, with the use of the piano thrown in, yea and the telephone, the type-writer, in short, everything in the house except her tooth-brush. So Grapefruit stayed, and at this period of their lives is as necessary a part of the Claybornes' traveling outfit as their collapsible drinking-cup.

After breakfast was over we lingered in the dining-room a while, as is our custom when we have

interesting guests; and we women rested our elbows on the table and talked, while the men lit their cigars and pounded the table-cloth until the spoons jumped out of the saucers, so vehement were their expressions about "that blackguard of a governor."

We women talked about Waterloo, of course.

"He's at the loveliest age, right now, I think," mother said, as our three pairs of eyes wandered out in his direction to the long back porch, where Grapefruit and Lares were making him a pack-saddle, so they could "tote 'im" down to the lot. He was entirely too good to walk that first morning.

"Yes, I rather dislike the thought of his growing into a great, rough, short-haired boy," Cousin Eunice assented, looking at him fondly. "That terrible age when they always smell like their puppies! But, that's quite a while off. He is still a baby."

"I find that they are always more or less babies," mother said, looking toward me, "—no matter what their age may be."

"Oh, this talk about ages reminds me of a book I brought for Ann to read," Cousin Eunice said, rising from the table and starting toward the front hall where their bags had been hastily dropped that we might not delay Mammy Lou's hot breakfast. "Stay

here, all of you, and wait until I get it. It contains an interesting thought."

"Then it's that much ahead of most new books," Rufe remarked, his attention having been attracted from his own line of talk by Cousin Eunice starting to leave the dining-room.

"It isn't strictly new," she commented, returning in a few moments with the book in her hand. "It was written several years ago. It's nothing out of the ordinary in plot, and the thought which impressed some of us in the 'Scribblers' Club' was concerning the age of Eve when she was created. The heroine of the story is named Eve and is young and fair, so the hero, a gallant soldier, remarks to her one day as they are walking by the river bank at a stolen tryst, that he fancies the first mother was at his sweetheart's identical age when she was created. You see, it is quite a poetic fancy."

"More poetic than true. Soldiers don't talk that way," father said drily. "How old did the book say this Eve was?"

"The author was too wise to tell in plain figures," she answered, "but it was somewhere under the twenties—in the early flush of youth."

"Well, Adam was the first man who ever had the

chance of a wife made to order," father kept on. "Surely he had more sense than to take a seventeen-year-old girl."

"No, you're wrong," Rufe disagreed. "I believe that Adam was too much of a gentleman to look a gift wife in the mouth."

"I'll get the Concordance and see if there's any record of her age," mother said, bustling off toward her bedroom and returning in a moment with her well-worn book, but she was unable to find any definite facts about Eve on the morning of that first surgical operation.

"What difference does it make about the actual number of years?" Rufe inquired, with an air of dismissing the subject. "The age of Eve is that picturesque period which comes to a girl after her elbows are rounded out."

My bared arms happened to be resting again on the table during this discussion, and, as Rufe spoke, Cousin Eunice's eyes wandered in their direction. "Then Ann's at it," she concluded triumphantly, and they all stared at me curiously, as if the age of Eve were showing on me like pock-marks!

"Ann doesn't seem nearly so old as she really is," mother began with a kind of uneasy look. "You see,

she has never been to school very much, so her education—”

“Now, please don’t begin about my education,” I begged, for it is a mooted question in my family whether or not I have any, father and I maintaining that I have all that is necessary, mother wishing that it had been more carefully directed along the conventional lines. “If I should go to school until I’m as old as Halley’s comet I couldn’t learn the things I don’t like. And I know all the rest without going! Don’t people call me up for miles around to ask who wrote *Prometheus Bound* and how to spell ‘candidacy?’ ”

“So you’re satisfied with yourself?” Rufe teased.

“Far from it,” I denied, “but I am certainly satisfied with the amount of schooling *in schools* I’ve had. Ugh, I hate the thought of it!”

“But how can you ever amount to anything without an education?” mother persisted.

“Never fear,” I assured her easily. “I’ll amount to my destiny, no matter whether I’ve ever seen inside a school or not. When I was a child I always imagined I was cut out to be Somebody; and even now I occasionally have a notion that Fate is watching me through her lorgnette!”

"You and Jean Everett used to have such queer ideas about yourselves—with your notions of marrying dukes and living in castles, and all that kind of thing," Cousin Eunice said, after a moment of amused thought.

"Jean still has her notions," Rufe broke in. "Our city editor is out of his depth in love with her and I met her on the street the other day and tried to bespeak her pity for the poor fellow. She assured me that the man *she* married would be so important the papers would all get out an extra every time his assassination was attempted!"

"Well, she'd better decide to take Guilford then," I said warmly, for it is a source of great satisfaction to me that my old friend, Jean (still my best friend), is half-engaged to Guilford Houghton, a grave young lawyer who is already making people take notice. He is a very quiet, dignified young man, so tall and thin and straight that he reminds me of a silk umbrella carefully rolled.

For a long time Jean seemed not to care much about him, but he kept paying his court as persistently as a fly in wet weather until she was finally won—half-way. He has very methodical ways, and calls to see her only on Sunday and Wednesday

evenings, but she devotes so much time and care to her toilet for hours and hours preceding these visits that we call them her "days of purification."

"Guilford is not so showy, maybe," she said to me one time, in explanation of her fondness for him, which she tries hard to conceal, "but he's so *dependable*. That's worth a lot to a girl who has been engaged to four or five Apollos, all of them about as reliable as drop-stitch stockings!"

"For my part, I admire Jean's ambition," father spoke up, although none of us suspected that he was listening to our rambling talk. "I'd rather see a girl with an ambition like that than one with none at all—one of these little empty-headed gigglers whose age of Eve announces its arrival by all the i's in her name being changed into y's."

Waterloo came in at this point and demanded again that the mules be shown him, so father and Rufe set out for the stables.

"Shall we walk around and look at things, too?" I asked Cousin Eunice as we filed out on to the back porch. It is a habit with us two to steal away for a quiet little talk the first few hours we are together and take stock of each other's happenings since we met last.

"No," she answered, looking at me steadily. "The orchard and vineyard are more beautiful in the afternoon. We'll walk all over the place then. Besides, I have a notion that you'll want to tell me things which will sound better in the afternoon sunshine."

"Not a thing," I denied, and wondered how a discussion of poetic fancies at the breakfast table could make her so sentimental.

"Then you are wasting some mighty valuable time," she replied. "Most normal girls of your age are brimful of plans and ideas." She would have said secrets, as she intended to, but Mammy Lou hove in sight just then with a big pan of butterbeans for me to shell for dinner.

Rufe had stopped her at the kitchen door with the usual query, "Well, Mammy, you're not married again?"

"Naw, sir," she had admitted, with a self-conscious smile, "although I did have a *boa'der* all the spring."

Waterloo protested against even this slight pause in their progress toward the stables, so with an amused smile Rufe forbore to continue the conversation, but passed on and Mammy Lou ambled in our

direction just in time to hear part of Cousin Eunice's remark to me.

"Law, Miss Eunice, you can't git nothin' out o *her*," she said disgustedly, as she set the pan of beans down and began to fan herself with her apron. "She's plen'y old enough, the Lord knows, to be takin' notice, *although* Mis' Mary don't think so. I heerd you-all talkin' 'bout certain ages at the breakfas' table, but I can tell you *she* ain't at it. She don't look at nary one of 'em twicet; an' when the shore-nuff age of Eve has come to a girl she begins eyin' *ever*' man she meets to see if he's got a missin' rib that'll match with hern!"

CHAPTER III

THE BOOKWORM TURNS

“**T**IS ill work trying to ride Pegasus on a side-saddle,” Cousin Eunice said this morning as she hurriedly threw aside her pencil and paper and ran to tell Dilsey about not putting any starch in the legs of Waterloo’s rompers. “He’s not a lady’s horse anyhow,” she continued as she came back and sat down on the grass again, “especially after a man, a baby and a gas stove have come into the lady’s life.”

“Gas stove?” I questioned, looking up from my book, a heavy old French book, it was, for mother’s remark about my neglected education had made me feel a little uneasy after all. Cousin Eunice is not the kind of woman to fill her letters full of household matters, hence my surprised question.

“A good cook, with me, is only a memory,” she said with a sadly reminiscent air. “I have a girl whose name is Pearl, but alas it is a lie! Even the

day I learned that my book had found a publisher I had to get up out of my trance and peel potatoes for luncheon."

"Surely not!"

"Yes. I peeled them, but they were never cooked, for when Rufe came home and heard the news he hustled us all off to town and we had luncheon in Beauregard's privatest dining-room. We ordered all the things that disagree with us most—by way of reckless indulgence."

"How did you feel when you heard that news?" I asked with interest, for the book manuscript which Cousin Eunice had been working on since the days of her single blessedness had grown to be like a member of the family with us all, especially of late years, after a certain critic had pronounced it good. It suddenly grew so valuable after that that she kept it in a little brown leather bag all the time and would never leave the house without telling somebody where that bag was (in case of fire) and making them promise to play Casabianca to those precious sheets until they should be rescued.

"Just dazed!" she answered simply. "Pretty much as I felt when I found that Rufe was going to be mine—only a great deal less so, you know."

"I wonder if you are ever going to be really great?" I pursued, for since I have grown so old I share all her hopes and fears, just as if we were sisters. "With a trip around the world as a starter, and a quiet little castle on the Italian coast as a next step. Then you can sign checks for a thousand dollars and get your pictures taken for nothing."

"Well, not at the rate I'm going now," she replied with a rueful smile toward her book and pencil lying inert on the grass; yet she made no effort to resume her work. Evidently the starch in Waterloo's rompers had driven away romance.

"But everything has its compensation," she continued after a moment. "If I never get my great trip around the world with a ten-days' stop-over in Japan I can never write a book about that long-suffering country, so I shall still have something to be thankful for."

"The public is the one to be thankful," I added.

"That's true, too," she agreed. "It may have cause to be thankful if this second book of mine is never finished, but nevertheless you don't know what a fever of impatience I'm in to see it all smoothly laid out between two pieces of paste-board and ready for the express label to be put on."

"Yes, I believe I do know, though certainly not about a *book*. I am sure I know what fever of impatience means." But she was so absorbed in her own troubles that she did not notice this indirect acknowledgment of mine.

"I had imagined that I could get my mind into a state of at least comparative tranquillity down here," she kept on. We were out in our favorite lair, a screened-off grassy spot in the side yard, where a double row of althea bushes furnishes a sense of security against intrusion, yet we were close enough to Waterloo to hear him every time he bumped his head or skinned his knee.

"This place is almost unearthly in its quiet beauty," she said after a moment, looking up through the green vista toward the house. The passion flowers were clambering up on the garden fence and running riot over the yellowing cornstalks. Back of the kitchen the well-house lay asleep in the sun, the star-like blossoms of white clematis which covered the roof of the old building were still untouched by that feathery change which forecasts their coming blight.

"It is beautiful—and it certainly is quiet," I coincided with her emphatically.

"Sometimes at home when the telephone bell and the door-bell and the club meetings and the butcher boys and the laundry men have all made a throbbing pain come in my head I steal away up-stairs to my little den where I lock the door and lie down to try to ease that nervous pain. Then I close my eyes and try to project my astral body down here into all this still, summer loveliness. I come up the gravel walk and on to the front porch—oh, those cedar porches! And I go through the shady hall to the back gallery where I find myself face to face with a great cold watermelon that has just been cut."

"And the library is full of roses, and there is a tray of fragrant peaches that Dilsey gathered early in the morning."

"Ah! I see that you feel its beauty just as much as if it were not an every-day affair to you," she said, looking at me with another one of those searching glances which she has treated me to several times lately. "No wonder you have grown to look like the place."

"To look like it!" I encouraged her to go on, for a compliment is more food for my soul than all the white hyacinths in a florist's window.

"Surely you look like it," she continued. "You are as patrician looking as the house—and as vivid as the flowers in the yard."

"Dear me!" I exclaimed. "Then I am *good-looking?*"

"Ann, don't be an idiot! If Aunt Mary had longed for a child as white as snow and as red as blood and as black as the ebony of her embroidery frame, she couldn't have produced anything more exotic than you."

There was a moment of silence in which I thought of the vivid beauty of Lady Caroline Lamb. Of course I am not anything to compare with her! *Of course* not! But how these vivid beauties *care*—for some one—when the time comes! Yes; when the time comes. But, dear me, it seems that it is never coming!

"Well, what good does it all do me?" I demanded at length, the long-pent-up storm of restlessness thundering to make itself heard. "Granted that I look as well as you say, and that I live in an earthly paradise—can't you see that there is no—that it is *lonesome?*"

"You are bored?" she asked sympathetically.

"Bored! I am stifling!"

"Yet the summer here is a joy—with oceans of morning-glories and miles of horseback riding!"

"It is a joy, I admit, and a thousand times better than being a summer girl at a noisy watering-place."

"What is a summer girl?" she asked with a smile, but I was not smiling. I was pessimistic.

"A sleepy-headed female with trunks full of soiled clothes! That's what I always am when I get back from a trip."

"Of course the winters here are dull." She had picked up her tablet and was writing her initials over and over again on the back.

"They are. Dull gray," I agreed. "The days are a weary succession of that uninteresting color; but, dreary as they are, you want them to last. When the daylight is fading and night coming on, but while it is still too early to light the lamps—then is the worst time of all! There is no sound on earth save a few lonely little calf bleats from down in the lot, until the woodchop echoes begin—and they are lonelier still."

"It's awful, I know!"

"Do you know what I do on such nights as this? I get out my opera-glasses and long gloves and a lace handkerchief, and lay them on my table as if I were

about to dress for a beautiful opera. Then I read *Aux Italiens*; think a while—and go to bed.”

“Poor child!”

“I used never to feel this way,” I kept on. “Always—until lately—I have loved winter. It has meant only great roaring fires and *barrels* of apples. Even the absorbing books which used always to accompany the apples and big fires are not absorbing any more.”

“Of course not. A girl with as much *go* in her as you have needs to lose herself entirely in something.”

“And that something will never be bound in three-quarters morocco,” I replied, flinging away my book impatiently.

“No, indeed! The bookworm has turned. The ‘something’ will be bound in an English tweed suit of clothes through the day’s business hours, and—”

“And a long gray overcoat, and a soft gray hat.” She looked at me in surprise.

“Then you’ve seen him?”

“I have seen—the type.”

She understood, but she still looked at me wonderingly.

“Alfred?” she ventured.

"No. He is my friend, but if I were in love with Alfred I'd have palpitations every time I passed the red cross on an ambulance. That's the way *I'm* going to love."

"I should think you could find an outlet for all the pent-up ambition you complain of, if you loved Alfred," she insisted, although she imagined that she was not insisting. "I have never met a more ambitious man, nor one of such singleness of purpose. Naturally success seems to gravitate toward him, as the crow flies."

"And still it seems such a short while ago that Doctor Gordon took a liking to him, when he was a raw medical student," I said thoughtfully, my mind going back to the day I first saw Alfred Morgan, big, broad and bronzed, with his hair too long and his sleeves too short. There have been many days since then; days of a delightful comradeship when I was in the city. I would look after him with sisterly authority, bidding him wear his rubbers on rainy mornings, or give me his gloves to mend whenever I happened to be spending the day at the Gordons' and we sat down for a quiet chat after luncheon. Ann Lisbeth and Doctor Gordon still live so close to the Claybornes that we are like one big

family when I am with them. Alfred soon began to tell me that I was his best friend, but he never called me the "guiding star of his existence." He tried to teach me the bones of the face, instead, and explained the barbarism of corsets.

When he was out in practice the first year, but still lived with the Gordons, because Doctor Gordon would not let him go, I used to drive around with him to see his patients, sitting out in the runabout, which he had bought at half-price because it was a last year's model, and reading a magazine while he went in to make his calls. Often these calls were made in crowded little factory settlements, where the whirr of the cotton-mills sounded through the long periods of waiting; and the houses were built so close on the street that I could hear the click of the lock as he unfastened his instrument case.

"I admit that Alfred's career generates thrills up and down the backbones of his admiring friends," I said after the pause which had been filled in by my busy thoughts. She was still writing her initials over the back of her tablet. "Who knows this better than I? Haven't I been a mother to the boy ever since that time I read surgical anatomy to him when he

had tonsillitis? One of the most dramatic moments of my life was the night I stabbed—”

I caught myself, but not in time, for Cousin Eunice had looked up from her book with a horrified stare. “*What?*” she demanded.

“Oh, it was only that detestable Burke’s automobile tire,” I had to explain then, but I had kept the occurrence a secret hitherto, and I was not keen on telling it now.

“It was during the year of Alfred’s internship and you remember that Burke was always doing him an ill turn? One drippy night that fall when I was in Doctor Gordon’s car in front of the hospital and they didn’t see me, I overheard Burke and another intern plotting to beat Alfred out of a surgical case that was coming in on the train that night and belonged, by rights, to him. They had arranged to hurry on over to the station first, in Burke’s new car that his fond mamma had given him, but when they went back into the house to get their raincoats I was out of that machine like a Nemesis and had stuck my hat-pin into the two tires on Burke’s car which were most in the shadow; so, when they started off, they had gone only about a block and were down

in the mud swearing—when Alfred dashed grandly by on the ambulance.”

“You little tiger!”

“Burke ought to have had the hat-pin stuck in *him*,” I added savagely.

“Aren’t we *still* barbarians—at heart?” she demanded, throwing her tablet aside and straightening up so suddenly that I knew her thoughts had already strayed away from my recital. “Now, that’s the way I have always felt about Appleton since he’s been governor. Lots of times when I have been helping Rufe write those violent attacks against him I would almost choke with rage. I actually wanted to kill him.”

“You *helped* Rufe?” I asked with envy. “He admitted that you had sense enough to?”

“Some of the *meanest* things the *Times* has ever printed about him were my thoughts,” she said proudly. “But it has never printed a lie!”

“Ah, that must be something worth while,” I commented admiringly, for my ideas concerning women and their possible achievements are strictly modern. “I should like to be the power behind the revolving-chair.”

I see already that the above paragraph contradicts

itself, for being the power *behind* things is as old as Eve; but then, the prerogative of contradicting oneself belongs by rights to her daughters.

"Do you care for politics any more than you used to?" Cousin Eunice asked hopefully.

"Politics and mathematics were ever of equal interest to me," I was bound to acknowledge. "But I have been able to understand a little about the primary plan this summer—father's taught me. And I know that the 'machine gang' is *always* the other fellows!"

"Well, that's a brilliant start," said a sarcastic male voice from the other side of the hedge, and Rufe's amused face rose up to our confusion. Without waiting for invitation he came through and sat down on the grass beside us.

"Well, she'd enjoy some of *our* politicians, wouldn't she?" Cousin Eunice asked Rufe as she moved over farther to give him more room, for the althea branches were wide and thick, and entangled themselves in our hair persistently. "Whether she cares for politics or no, eh?"

"Oh, she'd lose her head over Chalmers," Rufe acquiesced as indifferently as the male relative of a girl always shows in discussing "possible" men.

"Lord Byron is as a comic valentine compared with him in looks."

"Richard Chalmers," I repeated. "I've seen his name in the paper often, but I don't know exactly what he is."

"Neither does any one else," Rufe answered meaningly. "He's a rich young lawyer—inherited his money—and so shrewd that he's not going to join the Appleton forces, no matter what pretensions they make to get him on their side." He spoke as if he were arguing the question.

"Of course he isn't," Cousin Eunice added stoutly.

"But what *is* he?" I asked, fearful lest they get into a discussion and forget to satisfy my curiosity, which was—strange to say—considerably aroused.

"Well, if he would declare himself definitely upon the liquor question," Rufe explained concisely, "he would be about the most promising piece of gubernatorial timber that we have."

CHAPTER IV.

A NEW GAME

“If we knew when walking thoughtless
Through some crowded, noisy way,
That a pearl of wondrous whiteness,
Close beside our pathway lay;
We would pause, where now we hasten,
We would often look around,
Lest our careless feet should trample
Some rare jewel in the ground.”

IT was like my extravagant nature to quote this verse of “speech day” poetry while engaged in such a commonplace pursuit, but then the age of Eve is an extravagant age.

I was in a tight little cell of a room back of the pantry, a hot enough place on an August morning; a little den where we store old magazines, last summer hats, pictures and bric-à-brac that we have outgrown, and piles of newspapers.

It was the last named species of junk that was absorbing my earnest attention, to say naught of per-

spiration, on the day I have in mind, which is by no means a distant one. My forehead was wet and my hair was sticking to it in damp little slabs, but I was unaware of this until afterward, when my family called my attention to it, and inquired where I had been and what I had been doing. Then I was in no mood to tell them.

"It ought to be somewhere in the June lot," I mused, as I stretched my arm across a bundle of worn-out bedroom curtains and dragged a batch of dusty papers over into my lap.

I have been very idle and lonely for the last few days, else I doubt if I should have been driven to such occupation as this. I knew it was foolish, even as I did it, but the Claybornes have been away, staying with the elder Claybornes a while, only returning this morning early, and Cousin Eunice has been so busy since then repairing the damage done Waterloo's clothes that she has been uninteresting to me. The Sullivans spent last week down in the country at a tiny town named Bayville, where there is no sign of a bay; and I have missed the workings of Neva sadly.

It denoted the recent trend of my mind that, as I thought of Neva, upon this occasion, I immedi-

ately remembered that her father is a strict anti-Appleton man. Anti-Appleton! How much the term means to me now! A week ago I cared no more for its sound than I cared for the nouns of the fifth declension.

I picked up the paper lying on top and began to fan with it a while before wading into the mazes of the stack. In the few papers which I had already looked over I found, *not* the object of my search, it is true, but wood-cuts and cartoons of men whose names have been familiar to me for months in a vague, unreal sort of way, making a sound to my ears, but meaning nothing—like the ringing of the telephone bell in the next room when you are fast asleep. Yet the telephone bell will finally awaken you if you are not dead—even *so* it might, if it is a doctor's telephone—and with what a start do you come to your senses as you reproach yourself for not recognizing its important voice sooner! I have felt this way many times lately, since I have taken up the study of politics; and have found it vastly more interesting than geometry.

The first mighty political name which ever forced itself upon my understanding was Cleveland, and it is not surprising to me now that I was mixed up

as to its significance and imagined that, instead of a surname, it was a title of nobility. It sounded like such a swelling note of praise to me, for I was only a few years old, and the torchlight procession on the night of his election filled me with a strange delight.

Since then I have always had a good memory for oft-repeated names, although I have frequently held as hazy impressions concerning them as I did of Mr. Cleveland's honored cognomen. The politicians of my native state have all gone by names that were as sounding brass and tinkling cymbals to my untutored ears until the last few days, when I have turned in and studied them as most girls study new embroidery stitches.

This is, in part, what I have learned: Appleton is our governor and is said to be everything that Charles I. of England was beheaded for—"tyrant, traitor, murderer, and enemy to his country." I know this is true because the paper we take says so; and if you are going to doubt what your favorite newspaper says, why, then, do you take it? I believe in loyalty above everything, and I think if the paper which supports the other side of the question should, by mistake, be thrown into your yard, you

ought to run and kick the horrid sheet over the fence into the gutter. That is, if you are a man. If you are a lady I advise you to use the tongs for the purpose, especially if there is any one passing by at the time.

Personally, I do not know Mr. Appleton, but I heard one fat, motherly woman, whose son held a job under him, say that he was such a kind-hearted governor because he set free so many poor prisoners! This remark impressed me, and I was beginning to think well of him, when here came that paper again (Rufe's paper) saying that the governor was turning them loose at so much per, a murderer being a little higher in price than a "pistol-toter," who, in turn, is more expensive than a boot-legger, the last really being a kind of bargain-day leader, inasmuch as he is such a help to the administration!

Well, I dare say no governor is a hero to all the papers in his state!

This is quite enough penmanship wasted on Mr. Appleton anyway; for he is as dead as Philadelphia on Sunday, and the public, with its handkerchief held to its nose, is only waiting until next election, when quicklime will be poured over the remains by the young and gallant Richard Chalmers.

Of course, you understand the cause of the political unrest? It is the whisky question, and everything in our state has been turned upside down by it; that is, everything except the whisky. It is turned upside down only when there is a glass under the bottle. Mr. Appleton favors this phase of the whisky agitation.

Next in importance after the governor is a man named Blake, Jim Blake, whom nobody ever calls James, and who is so much like a big fat worm that I never pass him in the streets without wanting to mash him. He is like one of those soft, white worms, you know, which I am sure I have eaten dozens of on nights when I used to take a handful of chestnuts to bed with me.

In the mountainous regions during his campaigns, they say, to make himself solid with the boys, Jim Blake uses bad English and good whisky; in the cities he uses good English and better whisky. All in all, he is the most popular man in the state—a fact which makes you wish you had anticipated Carlyle's remark about the population of his country being mainly fools.

Major Blake was a power in politics a few years back, then he went into obscurity for a while, on

account of an ailing daughter, it was said, who had to live in the West if she would live at all. The story goes the rounds that at one time he gave up a senatorship for the sake of staying with this daughter; and, if this is true, I beg his pardon for calling him a worm!

Her name is Berenice Blake, which sounds so beautiful to me that I feel sure her mother must have been the one who named her. I suppose she improved somewhat in health from her outdoor life in the West, for her father came back after a while, and at this present time she makes frequent vibrations between her home and Denver, every one of which causes prolonged paroxysms in the society columns.

In his political affiliations Jim Blake is like—like—my kingdom for a simile! I might with truth say that he is like a chameleon, but I have already likened him to a worm, and I do not care about getting reptiles on the brain, especially this late at night. Also I might say that he is like a lake of quicksilver, except that such a body would resemble a stagnant, green-scummed pool compared with the surface spring of his opinions—opinions which vary with the tinkle of silvery sounds.

Yet the fact is there, and as immovable as a window-sash in wet weather, that he is the most popular man in the state. And, while what I have repeated about him is truth, or as near truth as anything is supposed to be in politics, it is disloyal gossip coming from me *now*, for Jim Blake is at home at present, he is unpledged, and we are hoping high hopes that he will come out on our side. The spectacle is pretty much like a body of priests which might be standing by watching for the devil to shed horn, hoofs and tail and put on a clean collar, buttoned behind.

With their zest for canonizing their leaders I wonder what the temperance workers *will* do with a man as handsome as Richard Chalmers is said to be? How the "popular young ladies" of the towns will fall over one another in trying to present him with a great sheaf of roses at the close of his speech! I hate that bouquet-presenting worse than anything else done by the women who mix up with candidates! Men hate it, too, and when I sounded Rufe on the subject he just frowned and said: "Oh, it's *awful*, but what are you going to do?" I suggested that he have the candidate say "Please omit flowers," or "I will not look upon the roses while

they are red," or words to that effect, at the close of his speech.

But Rufe shook his head sadly.

"There are three things in this life that a woman is a fool about," he explained to me, "the surgeon who removes her appendix, the minister who saves her soul, and the politician who lets her 'take on' over him in public!"

"But the candidate *hates* the flowers and the praying at the polls and the general patting on the back like 'he's-mamma's-good-little-boy' that they inflict upon him, doesn't he?"

"I should *think* so," Rufe admitted.

I was studying over this phase of the next year's campaign when I attacked the pile of papers in my lap and was wondering if Richard Chalmers would hate the fuss they would inevitably make over him.

June 14, 15, 16, I glanced through without finding anything of interest, and it was tiresome work. Oh, why did I not realize at the time these papers were fresh and new that they held a "pearl of wondrous whiteness?" It would have saved all this trouble. But likely Mammy Lou had used the *very* one to kindle the fire with. That would be worse than tramping the rare jewel in the ground! Ah!

Was it prophetic that just as I was thinking over the words "rare jewel" the object of my search met my eyes? Of course, you are not stupid, my journal, and you have long ago seen that I was looking diligently for all the news, but *mostly* the picture of Richard Chalmers, the good-looking young David who might slay the monster Goliath, if he would take his smooth pebble from a *brook* and not from a brewery!

Well, it was the picture I found, and his name was in big letters beneath. I looked at the face first, then quickly at the name, but I put the two together with difficulty.

"So Richard Chalmers is *you*!" I said aloud in my surprise. Then I stared at the picture as steadfastly as Ahmed Al Kamel must have looked at the portrait of the princess, the first woman's face he had ever seen. A feeling of superstition came stealing over me and daring me to say that this was only a happen-so.

"So it's *you*," I repeated without moving my eyes from the picture, "and that must be why I felt such a curious interest in this political business."

The stuffy heat of the tight little room, the piles of dusty old papers, the politics and rumors of poli-

tics were all forgotten in a twinkling as my memory bounded back and even took in the details of the landscape that dull day last November when I saw him first. Alfred Morgan had asked me to drive with him out one of the pikes where he had a call to make. I was at Cousin Eunice's and he had called me by telephone to ask me to go; Cousin Eunice and Ann Lisbeth were wrestling over an intricate shirt-waist pattern, but they both stopped long enough to insist that it was too cold for me to go so far out just for the fun of going. But I insisted equally as firmly upon going, so Ann Lisbeth made me wear her motor bonnet and long fur coat, which were very becoming.

Our route lay out one of the pikes which I like most, a beautiful driveway, with a lovely little Jewish cemetery about three miles out. I found that it *was* cold, and when we reached the cemetery I asked Alfred to put me out so that I could walk around a bit and try to get warm—while he made his call just a short distance farther up the road. He could honk-honk for me if I had wandered out of sight by the time he came back. We frequently did that way.

Then it was that I first saw Richard Chalmers,

coming out of the little red lodge house at the gates of the cemetery. He was dressed in gray, with a long gray overcoat and a soft gray hat; and his fairness made no break in the dull monochrome of the surroundings. The brilliant-hued lodge, with the Oriental dome, made the only warm spot of color in my line of vision, but he was looking at me, too, and I am sure he saw other spots of color, for my face flushed somewhat as I recognized him as being the first man I had ever seen in my life whom I cared about looking at.

He must be tall, for the coat he wore that day was quite long, but I do not remember taking in any details except his face. This was natural, for it appeared to me then as being a very good face to look at, even aside from the peculiar charm which afterward made me remember it so. Cameo-like in its distinctness, with steel-gray eyes, it reminded me of the face I used to tell Jean about years ago when we each had an Ideal. "Cold-blooded and lean as Dante," my description had been in those bygone days, and Richard Chalmers' face strangely fitted it, though by no means so cold nor so lean as I had formerly thought necessary for perfect charm. It was only lean enough to be intellectual-looking,

and, if the keen gray eyes were cold, they were also strong. His hair was short and of a very light-brown color; I remembered this distinctly, for he had taken off his hat as he bade good-by to whoever was inside the lodge, and he had stood a moment bareheaded as he saw me, and looked at me with a degree of well-bred surprise. There was nothing unusual in this, for, in driving out the country roads with Alfred and Doctor Gordon, I have often observed that when two well-dressed people pass each other they usually look. Each one is likely wondering what the other is doing so far from the madding crowd.

I was wondering what he was doing, Anglo-Saxon that he so evidently was, coming from a Hebrew cemetery; then he untied the hitch-rein of a horse that was restlessly twitching its head at a post near by, jumped into the light buggy and drove off. Alfred and I passed him a little later on, for he had been driving slowly, evidently to the distaste of the horse. The creature was just the kind of animal you would expect a man of his appearance to drive—slim and satiny and fast. Alfred slowed up as we were passing, for the horse had drawn quickly to one side of the road and was trembling

with fright. The man in the buggy held a tight rein and spoke a soothing word to her, then turned and regarded us again. My heart bounded as our eyes met, and I wondered why he had driven back to town so slowly.

The marked look of intellect which his face bore gave it an appearance of asceticism, which his handsome clothes and general make-up belied. He looked almost as unworldly as a monk—a monk fashionably dressed and driving a race-horse!

We passed each other again the very next week, in the lobby of the city hall this time, where I had gone with Ann Lisbeth to pay the water-tax. He was talking with two men, and, as he recognized me, he drew both of these men slightly to one side that Ann Lisbeth and I might make our way to the elevator without being crowded. This time I had passed so close to him that I could see the tiny lines around his eyes, left there by the warring elements of his character, I imagined afterward, when I was trying to recall every feature with its own expression and thereby piece out, to my own satisfaction, a nature for my impressive Unknown.

“He may do bad things sometimes,” I finally concluded triumphantly, “but he never enjoys doing

them, because he has a conscience that will not let him."

Once again I saw him, some time afterward, at the entrance of a theater one crowded night when the most popular actress on the American stage was playing. An emotional little actress she is, whose feelings seem to be stationed largely in her fingertips, for she uses them as if she were talking to deaf mutes with them. I criticized the play, pronounced the leading man a "plumber," made remarks about the extravagant finger-play and otherwise spoiled my pleasure to such an extent that I realized for the first time what a hold upon my imagination the face of this Unknown had taken. He had passed quite close, but he had not seen me!

After this I had thought about him very often, and, while he was not exactly only a "type" to me, as I had been careful to explain to Cousin Eunice, still, as the weeks slipped by and I had not seen him again, his face became a kind of pleasant picture that I might draw out sometimes and look at. A miniature, it must have been, for I carried it with me everywhere I went; and it always seemed to bring with it a sudden radiance, like a burst of sunshine at the close of a dreary day.

A burst of sunshine at the close of a dreary day! The words were lingering pleasantly in my memory when I was called back to earth by the united voices of my family.

"Ann!" mother called. "*Ann!*"

"I've looked all over the place for her," I heard Cousin Eunice say, and the sound of hurrying feet toward the dining-room gave me a suggestion that it was time to eat again.

I ducked through the pantry door and made my way up-stairs without being seen by any one. I bathed my face in cold water, which helped a little, then I came on back down-stairs and faced them. They all looked up at me. It was awful!

"Where you been at?" Mammy Lou inquired in a low but penetrating voice as I passed her at the dining-room door; and the question was repeated in other degrees of sound and grammatical precision. They were all looking at my damp forehead.

"I tried to find you an hour ago," Cousin Eunice said, "I wanted to tell you the news."

"And I wanted you to polish the silver on the sideboard," mother said in an injured voice.

"Ann, we looked evvywhere fer you," Waterloo chimed in, with his mouth so full that Cousin Eu-

nice's attention was attracted to it and she made him unload the portions of nourishment that were visible externally. "Me and Grapefruit found a little *tarrypin*. Aunt Mary said you wasn't scared of 'em!"

"Well, I'm glad it was nothing more important than a 'tarrypin' that needed my ministrations," I began, thankful for a topic so entirely earthly, but there was a hue and cry.

"Important!" Cousin Eunice exclaimed. "There are three mighty politicians coming here to dinner to-night!"

"And the silver needs polishing," mother supplemented.

"Rufe was talking with them over the telephone this morning," father explained. "They are in Bayville at a temperance rally and will have to come here to-night to catch a car back to the city. Mother and I thought it would be a shame to let them go to the hotel for dinner—they're such friends of Rufe's."

"Now, you needn't lay it on Rufe," mother said, smiling at him. "You know that if an Englishman dearly loves a lord, an American dearly loves a lion. It's *you* who want to hear them roar."

"Richard Chalmers is the only lion, so don't look so startled, Ann," Rufe said, as he began passing me things to eat; but I was not hungry.

"The other two likely eat with their knives," Cousin Eunice added soothingly, as she still used her endeavors toward having Waterloo feed himself like an anthropoid being.

"Oh, Ann doesn't worry over company," mother said, as she glanced at me again. "She's been asleep. That's what makes her look—startled."

CHAPTER V

PRINCE CHARMING

I HAD not been asleep, but I had been in a dream; a dream from which I had awakened to a state of greater unreality.

After the meal was over and the family had all left the dining-room I was still in a dream as I rolled my sleeves up high and began giving hasty dabs with the metal polish to the ancient silver on the side-board. How delightful it is to have heirloom silver! I failed even to grow cross over the long, hot search for flannel cloths and the gritty feeling which this distasteful task always leaves around my fingertips.

Still in a dream, I stood at the back kitchen door and watched Dilsey decapitate the plumpest fowls the poultry yard boasted. I saw Lares and Penates flying up and down the cellar steps, and to the garden, orchard and vineyard—all at the same time. Later on in the afternoon I was still dazed when

I saw the ominous black signs of a thunder-storm coming up darkly from the southwest; and I heard father out in the hall using strong language at the telephone when he learned that the liveryman had sent Bob Hall, the town idiot, to Bayville to bring the lions back.

Now Bob Hall is a kind-hearted, narrow-eyed lad, whose mind has never been right because his mother drove twenty miles to a circus just before he was born, so the villagers explained; but, be that as it may, Bob has never been able to learn much beyond when to say "Whoa" and "Git up," but the joy of his life lies in saying these, so that the liverymen of the town are glad to have him hang around the stables and help with the horses at feeding and watering-time. Because the regular driver was a little drunker than usual to-day Bob had been sent to Bayville on that delicate commission!

"He's just as likely as not to dump 'em out in a mud-hole," father said wrathfully, as he hung up the receiver when mother implored him to leave off swearing over the telephone during an electrical storm. "He'll make some kind of mess of it—you see if he doesn't."

I shuddered as I pictured that elegant gray over-

coat all disfigured with mud; then I shuddered again at being such an idiot as to imagine he would have on an overcoat in August. And I wondered how he would look without it, and decided that he would look grand, of course!

About five o'clock the storm burst in good earnest, the rain coming down in heavy sheets at first and later settling into a lively drizzle that promised to be good for all night.

With the rain came a noticeable effort on the part of father's rheumatism to attract attention to itself; and Mammy Lou began clapping her hand over her right side in an alarming manner.

Ever since an attack of gall-stones which she suffered over a year ago, and through which she was safely steered by Alfred Morgan—which, of course, placed him upon an Alfred-the-Great pinnacle in the affections of the whole family—we have all turned in and helped Mammy Lou with her work. Especially when company is coming we agitate our minds over the actual meat and bread part of the entertainment, which I abominate, for personally I am domesticated only so far as frothy desserts and embroidered napkins go; and I am now able to understand the decline of hospitality in the South.

Why, since mammy's spell I have actually learned how to "do up" my best blouses, which is a joy so long as I am working on the front, where the embroidery stands out in satisfying bas-relief, but I am ready to weep and long for father's vocabulary by the time I reach the gathers of the sleeves. I should certainly let these go unironed if mammy did not always come to the rescue with a few deft strokes of the Gothic-shaped end of the iron.

I must say, though, that she accepts our help with an exalted indifference, for, since that awful pain in her side, things temporal have been of small moment with her. She has turned to the comforts, or discomforts, of a deeply Calvinistic religion, and is so keen-scented after sin that when I darn stockings on Sunday morning I have to lock my door and pull down the window-shades.

The only symptom of remaining worldliness which I have noted since her belated conversion, besides her overwhelming desire to get me married off to Alfred (my only rival in her affections) was exhibited early this last spring, when her above-mentioned "boarder" was a new-comer in our neighborhood and father had engaged his services to "break up" the garden.

Sam, the homesick stranger, made strong appeal to mammy's hospitality, quite aside, as we thought, from the natural susceptibility of her affections. The man was big and *yellow*, mammy's favorite color in husbands, and I scented danger one night soon after he came when I happened to see her place before him on the table in the kitchen a mighty dish of "greens" flanked on all sides with poached eggs.

He was busily plying her with questions, between mouthfuls, and when he asked her point-blank "what aged 'oman she was" she threw her head so coquettishly to one side that she splashed half a plateful of "pot liquor" on the floor, as she responded airily: "Oh, I don't rickollect exactly! I'm forty-five, or fifty-five, or sixty-five—somewhere in the *fives!*"

We held our breath for the next few weeks, expecting at any moment to hear that mammy had decided to out-Henry Henry Eighth, but her religion was too fresh and too enjoyable for her to resign it and marry the seventh time, which she realized would be a bad example for her progeny. Still, there was Sam, in dangerous propinquity, three times a day; and he was broad-shouldered and *enchantly* yellow! She withstood, as long as it was

in her poor, affectionate heart to withstand; then she compromised and took him as a boarder! After searching about for a means of easing her conscience for this concession she lit upon Lares and Penates as brands to be snatched from the burning; and she taught them such doleful facts about the uncertainty of their salvation that the last time Alfred was down here we persuaded him to threaten her with nervous prostration for Lares if she persisted in her gloomy preachments.

"A boy or girl's responsible for they sins as soon as the bumps breaks out on they faces," she was telling them this afternoon, when the storm was at its worst, and the two sat huddled with Grapefruit behind the stove, like poor little frightened chickens in a fence corner.

Mother, who had not seen the meaning gestures that mammy had been making toward her volcanic right side, was inclined to make light of the sins of the twins, and suggested that they come out from behind the stove, so that the minute the rain held up a little they could run on down to the ice-factory and tell the man to hurry with the ice. We were going to have our favorite caramel cream that night.

But with mother's advent into the kitchen the

pains in mammy's side grew much worse, and she began suggestions that she didn't know but what the Lord was going to strike her with another spell, "for the old dominecker rooster had been crowin' sad all day!"

The rain kept on, and late in the afternoon the ice-man telephoned that some of the machinery at the factory was broken, so there would be no ice! Then father's rheumatism suddenly grew so bad that we had to stop our preparations for the feast, and spent half an hour searching for the stopper to the hot-water bag. He must have that bag put to his shoulder, he declared, but after we gathered all the essentials together and put it there he could not stand it on account of the heat!

Upon going back to the kitchen to temper the water down a little I was astounded at mammy's declaration that, if Dilsey would go down to the cabin and bring up her easy chair, while I held an umbrella over it, she would *try* to stay up long enough to direct *us* about finishing that dinner! Did ever a girl have such dreams and such nightmares mixed up together?

Night descended rapidly, as night has ever had a way of doing when you are in a fearful hurry, and

mother was distractedly searching through her recipe book for a dessert that could be quickly made, yet when finished would be grand enough to set before gubernatorial timber!

Her maternal love had caused her steadily to refuse my help with the dessert, and she made me run on up-stairs for a final bath and a few minutes of manicuring before time to dress. "Be sure to dress carefully," she had bidden me, as she always does, for sometimes I am inclined to be a little absent-minded in the matter of hooks and eyes; but her warning was superfluous to-night.

"Make yourself beautiful—an' *skase*," is Mammy Lou's favorite slogan in the campaign after masculine admiration, and I had prepared to carry it out so far as nature and instinct would permit. I had carefully pressed my prettiest white gown, a filmy, ruffled thing, and spread it out on my bed, with a petticoat that was long enough, but *not* too long, lying conveniently near. Where is the woman who has not shed tears and used feminine profanity because she could not find exactly the right petticoat at an eleventh-hour dressing?

As I came into my room I glanced toward the bed with a feeling of complacency, then I turned

on the lights and looked more closely. My hopes fell and I saw that the gown had shared in the general determination of everything on the place to go wrong that afternoon because we were so particularly anxious that all should go right. A window near the bed had been left open, in the hurry and confusion, and the dress had seemed to drink in every bit of dampness that it could find lying around loose. It looked as limp and dejected as if it had slept in an upper berth the night before. I had no other thin dress that was available, with all its attachments, at that hour, so I laid aside my ambition to look romantic and slipped on a shirt-waist—with a collar so stiff that it scratched my neck until I looked as if I bore the marks of the guillotine.

Toward eight o'clock, after it was inky dark, and mother had got her dessert safely stored away in the refrigerator to cool, she and I were taking a breathing spell in the dining-room, although we were holding our breath every other minute, listening for the approach of wheels, when the night began to be made hideous by the sounds of the most violent calf distress down in the lot.

"Ba-a-a-h! *Ba-a-a-a-ah!*" came in hoarse, hollow bellows to our already overstrained ears.

"It's that hateful little Jersey," mother said, starting up and going toward the kitchen. "He has his head caught in the fence again!"

"You sit still," I said, drawing her back toward her chair, "I'll go and send Penates to unfasten him."

There were savory odors in the kitchen, and mammy was so interested in the final outcome of the meal that she had abandoned her temporary throne and was stirring around the stove as usual. The three little negroes were gathered at the window, looking out into the blackness and listening with enjoyable horror at the turbulent sounds from the cow-lot.

"Go and unfasten him, Penates," I said. "He'll kill himself and us, too, with that noise!"

But Penates looked at me to see if I could be in earnest. When he saw that I was he began to whine.

"I's a-skeered to!" he half whimpered.

"The idea! A great big boy like you! What are you afraid of?"

"Granny's done tol' us the devil's gwiner ketch us," he began, and, as he saw mother coming in at the kitchen door, he looked appealingly toward her;

but the nerve-racking strain of the afternoon had done its work with her—and the calf voice was something frightful!

“Your granny’s an old idiot,” she said forcefully, looking with wrath toward the stove, where mammy was peering into the oven in an entirely detached fashion. “You go straight and unfasten that calf!”

“Mis’ Mary, I declare he’ll ketch me ef I so much as step outside the do’ there in the dark! Granny’s jus’ now tol’ us he’s watchin’ ever’ minute to ketch us—”

“Lou, you ought to be ashamed of yourself to stuff these children’s minds full of lies!” mother said, exasperated out of all semblance of her gentle, even-tempered self by the piled-up mishaps of the afternoon and the anguish of the present moment.

In case you have never heard a calf with his head caught in the fence I will state, under oath, that the diabolical sounds of the Brocken scene in Faust are dulcet music compared with the cry for help that the terrified creature sends forth. It usually brings the neighbors for miles around to find out the cause of the trouble, or rather *why* the trouble is permitted to continue—for every one who has ever heard it

once knows its sound for ever. What an unlovely salute for Prince Charming when he should drive up in the rainy, black night, I was thinking in agony!

Mammy straightened up and looked at mother as steadfastly as she had looked the day she announced her determination of marrying Bill Williams, the "Yankee nigger."

"It's a *sin* to teach children about the devil!" Mother's voice was a challenge.

"*Sin?* Why, Mis' Mary!" Mammy's tones were husky with horror. "An' you been a church member for thirty years!"

"Well, the devil has never entered into *my* calculations in all those thirty years," mother responded hotly, not observing that father had slipped up close behind her and was listening to the theological controversy with an amusement which had routed his rheumatism.

"Well—that's between you an' your Maker," mammy argued stoutly. "I'm goin' to treat *my* devil with some respect, if white folks *don't* mention theirs no mo' than if he was a po' relation that lived in Arkansas!"

Father was smiling almost audibly, but mother

was not looking in his direction—and the little Jersey had evidently found no balm in Gilead for his afflicted head!

"I don't believe there's any *such* thing as a devil!" mother finally broke out with vehemence; and she had turned quickly around as if she would go to the cow-lot herself, when she beheld father standing there, a look of amazement upon his face.

"*Mary!* Have I lived to hear you deny the faith of your fathers?"

But mother was in no mood for banter.

"Don't *you* talk to me about the devil, Dan Fielding!" she said, facing him squarely, and reluctantly unfolding her daintiest linen handkerchief to wipe the little beads of perspiration from across her upper lip. "I've had enough to make me believe in him this day, with three politicians coming, and a thunder-storm, and a broken ice-factory, and rheumatism and gall-stones!"

"Well, you know *you* were the one who suggested inviting them here," father defended himself, Adam-like.

"Well, maybe I was, but I should never have dreamed of such a thing if you hadn't said, with that woebegone look of yours that you wished you

could see them and hear them talk about the latest phases of the situation! Then, just to please you, I suggested that it was too bad to let them go to that dreadful hotel for dinner, when it would be no trouble for Mammy Lou to prepare one of her delightful meals!"

"Of course, neither one of us could know beforehand how deucedly contrary everything was going to turn out to-day, else I should have told you *not* to invite them"—father was reiterating in what he intended for a soothing tone, when all of a sudden I heard the tramp of feet upon the front porch, for my ears all the time had been straining in that direction, else I should never have heard them, far away as the kitchen is, and with that hideous noise.

"*Hush!*" I implored, as the footfalls grew quite distinct and I pulled down my cuffs, settled my belt, fluffed my hair out a little more at the sides, and flicked a tiny feather off the toe of my shoe. "They've come!"

"And Ann in a shirt-waist suit," mother sent after father as a final shot when he started toward the front part of the house, "and that bovine orchestra!"

She hurried into her bedroom and made a motion with her powder-puff before she followed father,

while I stopped in the dining-room and gave a glance of satisfaction at the shaded lights, the old-fashioned good taste of the furnishings, and the quantities of roses. The table was perfect, and I knew mammy too well to doubt that the dinner, too, would be everything that palate or eye could desire; then I glanced into the great old gold-framed mirror hung above the mantelpiece.

"I believe he'll enjoy his dinner," I decided, nodding in a friendly fashion toward the reflection in the glass; and, hearing the voices still coming from the direction of the porch, I hurried on out there.

They had come! In truth they had come, but alas it was not Richard Chalmers and satellites! It was Miss Delia Badger, Mrs. Sullivan and Neva, drenched and bewildered, that Bob Hall, the fool, had brought from Bayville!

"Oh, Mrs. Fielding," poor Mrs. Sullivan was saying beseechingly, as she looked at mother's startled face, "*do* you know what's happened to Tim? We was to stay another week at maw's, but when Bob Hall drove into Bayville at dinner-time to-day and said he'd come after somebody that wanted to get took back here to Mr. Fielding's house, I knew it must a-been Tim took sick and sent for me! So we

all piled right in without waitin' for me to belt down my Mother-Hubbard!"

"Jumping Jerusalem!" said father, and the calf bellowed dismally.

Investigation had shown the Sullivan cottage to be locked and barred, and the supposition was that Tim, although not already sick, was in a fair way to be so in the morning, as persistent telephoning on my part finally located him at the drug store with a crowd of friends whose company was both cheering and inebriating.

"I better git Bob to drive down there an' git 'im," Mrs. Sullivan suggested forlornly, looking at Bob, who was leaning against one of the big, white columns and twirling his cap around on one finger.

"For heaven's sake, *don't*," father objected. "He'll be just as likely to drive up with the county undertaker as with Tim Sullivan! I'll go myself."

"But who'll get the calf out of the fence corner?" mother asked anxiously, as father walked to the hat-rack for an umbrella.

"*Me!*" cried Bob, speaking for the first time, but to so much purpose that we all beamed gratitude upon him.

So, after being "much tossed about by land and on the deep," the calf was finally loosed from his pillory, the Sullivans were settled in the sanctuary of their own home, the lovely dinner was eaten in silence, and our family went grumpily to bed.

Then this morning early the three belated dinner guests drove in from Bayville. The two lesser lights caught the nine-o'clock car into the city, but Mr. Chalmers drove on to the little hotel in the village and later presented himself, in due calling season, at our house, with apologies for the catastrophe of last evening. Mother said he had spoken of it as catastrophe before I came into the room, but when he mentioned the accident to me later on in the day, as we two sat quite apart from the others, he referred to it as *calamity*.

Father and Rufe urged him to spend the day, an invitation which mother warmly seconded after a moment's quick recollection of how many of the dainties left over from last night's feast could be creamed and pâted and souffled.

He said it was rather necessary for him to be in town that day, but he stayed; and father and Rufe both remembered during the course of the forenoon that they had some matters to attend to which, if

he would excuse them for half an hour or so, they would despatch with all possible haste and rejoin him before the ladies had quite had time to talk him to death!

Rufe really did have some telephoning to the city to get through with; it is his regular morning duty; and father had to drive across part of our place to give directions about some fences which had been washed away last night. Of course, mother was needed about the dining-room, but Cousin Eunice, bless her, unselfishly betook herself off up-stairs out of pure kindness of heart!

Even the day was one of those golden days which come at the very end of summer, when the cool morning air mounts to the head like old wine, and the rich afternoon sunshine seems to hover lovingly over the earth and rejoice in having fulfilled the summer's glorious promise. All through the morning the birds caroled as happily as if they thought it was winter instead of summer a-dying; then later, they settled down like the rest of the world in the hushed silence of the hot afternoon, when the heat causes a brilliant haze over the fields around; and it seems as if all nature rests.

All my life this hour of summer afternoons has

held a strange, undefinable sadness. When I was a little girl and used to spend long hours out under the trees reading, my book would always drop from my hand as this period of stillness came on, and my eyes would wander away to the intense blue of the sky and the dazzling whiteness of the distant clouds, while a small but persistent voice seemed to keep mocking my memory with the query: "*Can't* you remember what used to happen on days like this?"

And my memory would grope longingly away after the lead of that tormenting voice, and it would visit all the far-away lands of Romance, summer lands of sunshine always, Italy, India, Egypt—but it never would remember exactly. "Where Tasso's spirit soars and sings," I used to repeat in a mystified wonder, for the beauties of his land were as familiar to me as my own fields and meadows.

Then I grew older and learned about reincarnation of the spirit. "That's it!" I cried exultantly, hugging the beautiful mysticism to my heart. "That is *bound* to be it!"

Life took on a new significance, and then for months I felt myself one with the initiated! I was radiantly happy and achingly miserable with this new, intangible philosophy; then Alfred Morgan

came along and told me that my vague memories were imagination; and that my restless longings came from a perpetual idleness. And I believed him, because I could not hear any statement from Alfred Morgan's lips without believing it.

"I'd rather have tuberculosis than an imagination like yours, Ann," he had said, and he advised me to learn to cook.

Perhaps it was the extraordinary beauty of the day and the surroundings that led our talk into unusual channels as Richard Chalmers and I walked out together through the golden afternoon haze. Yes, we had our hour alone again, as in the morning; but not by accident this time. He had graciously demanded it.

"Can't you rescue me from Clayborne's relentless newspaper spirit?" he had asked in a low tone while we were at the table. I smiled assent, whereupon he looked at me gratefully and a few minutes later announced that I had promised to show him the orchard where those magnificent peaches grew.

So it happened that when the rest of the family dispersed in different directions, early in the afternoon, I pinned on a big, flat hat—a white embroidered affair, with a great bow of black velvet

ribbon—and walked with him out into the glow. Down the avenue of cedars we went and up the broad road, for the orchard can be reached through a big gate opening off the pike, and the distance is much longer around that way. We soon gained the desired shade of its luxuriant leafiness, and I pointed out to him our most noteworthy trees. He admired their beauty without looking at them.

After walking around the orchard a bit we finally sat down on a fragment of stone wall, a prehistoric structure, which still protects a portion of the grounds; and he took off his hat and began to fan with it. His forehead was a little damp, and, as he wiped away the perspiration, I observed again the exceeding fairness of his skin. His hair, too, is so nearly light that the sprinkling of gray is almost unnoticed, save by the closest scrutiny.

My survey of him, while at close range, was quite brief, for, after a remark or two about the heat at this time of day, he turned to me suddenly and asked with disconcerting straightforwardness:

“What were you doing that day at the gates of the little cemetery?”

“Oh! Why, I was walking around—trying to get warm.”

I longed to ask him what he was doing there.

"I figured that day that you were a faithful little soul, going out to visit some hallowed spot. You looked so strikingly dark and *vivid* against the colorless background of the sky that I quite thought you were Oriental. Then the next time I saw you, in the lobby of the city hall—do you remember?—Well, you were with a tall, foreign-looking woman, a Russian, I imagined; so that convinced me—"

"She is a Pole," I corrected, "but she's the wife of Doctor Gordon, a great friend of ours."

"—and that convinced me," he went on, as if Ann Lisbeth's nationality were of no more moment to him than one of the bits of stone which I had gathered up from fragments scattered over the top of the wall, and was making white marks upon the solid rock sides with these tiny splinters, "that you were foreign." Then, in a lower tone, and with little hesitation in his delightful, drawling voice, he added: "I called you Rebecca—because I had to call you something."

"How disappointing to find me a plain American girl!"

"When I found this morning that you are an American girl—I deny the 'plain'—I gave a start

which I know was noticed by everybody in the room! It isn't often that I lose my self-possession, but I was *amazed* to find you here, in this little town—and my friend, Clayborne's, niece."

"His wife's cousin," I explained, but again he paid no attention to my interruption.

"I had haunted the theaters and shopping districts for weeks last winter—looking for Rebecca," he finished up. "No wonder I was surprised to find that you are *you*!"

He paused, waiting for me to say something, and, just because it was the last thing I wished to say, and because I would not, for the world, have had him suspect such a thing, I stammered out the truth!

"I—I wondered who *you* were, too," I faltered. "You are so entirely Anglo-Saxon-looking; and the place is Hebrew! Besides, it was such a very cold day to visit a cemetery!"

He smiled a little, but politely caught at my bait.

"I had been to see old man Cohen, the sexton. He is interested in politics."

Then we fell to talking about foreign types of faces, a subject which he discussed extremely well, having traveled everywhere, as I felt sure he had when I first laid eyes on him; and from the types of

beauty, we fell to discussing the various countries. He looked surprised at what he termed the "wistful" note in my voice when I asked him questions about my favorite lands; and he smiled when I explained to him that I have never been anywhere.

"So much the better for your enthusiasm," he said with the provoking air of a person who has been everywhere and done everything—and found it all a bore. "I judge that you are a very enthusiastic young woman."

"My daily life is punctuated with exclamation points," I admitted, but I longed to ask him how he knew I was enthusiastic. Still, it has always seemed in bad taste to me for a girl to try to draw a man into a long discussion of her personality—a new acquaintance, I mean. Mammy Lou's slogan, "Make yourself beautiful, and *skase*," can be applied in devious ways that she wotted not of when she handed it down to me.

"I suppose that is partly on account of your age?" he said, still looking at me with his amused smile.

My age! His tone and smile awoke a kind of resentment. He must feel himself infinitely older and wiser, else he would never assume that superior air.

"Age has nothing to do with it! It is entirely a

matter of temperament," I contradicted, with a little show of feeling. He smiled more broadly, and a hot flush of shame spread over my face as I recalled my dreams of this man. I had thought of him for months, had imagined him in every great and heroic rôle; had made a hero of him. Worse still, I fancied that he—perhaps—had thought of me; had stayed here to-day because he had found me! And here he was smiling down at me as he made playful remarks about my age!

"Why should you look distressed over a mention of your age?" he suddenly broke in, so gently that I looked up in surprise and found his face grave. He had been reading my thoughts—at least in part. "Now, if you were as old as I—that would be something worth troubling over."

"You? Yet the papers always speak of your youth. They will call you the 'boy governor' when you're elected."

He was pleased at my words.

"Or the boy who also ran—perhaps! But age is only a relative condition. My political friends call me a boy because I am only thirty-seven years old. Yet, to *you* that age may seem patriarchal. Doesn't it?"

I thrilled at the look of earnestness in his eyes. He was the one now who was concerned over what I thought of his age.

"Rufe is thirty-seven," I answered, trying to make my tone non-committal.

"And yet you call him Rufe!"

"I've known him always. He's like my brother."

"Well, if you should some day grow to know me 'always,' could you—even if I am thirty-seven—could you call me Richard?"

I made several violent white marks upon the old rock wall with the bit of stone in my hand before I attempted to answer this, the most intimate question ever put to me by a man in my life. Except for Alfred I had never known any other man well, and had certainly never cared about sitting with one upon an old stone wall while the glorious summer afternoon slipped by. All I knew of even incipient love-making I had read in books, so that I could not tell whether his question meant much or little. I had told him earlier in the afternoon that I was booked for a long visit in the city this fall, whereon he had congratulated himself on his friendly footing with the Claybornes. It was possible he meant—

"Could you?" he repeated softly.

I stopped making marks and threw away the bits of stone. I had opened my lips to reply, although I do not know what I had intended saying, when there was an Indian yell close behind us.

"Whoopee! Here he is again!" came an exultant voice, and, glancing around, we beheld a freshly bathed and dressed Waterloo, digging his white linen knees and elbows into the soft black earth, as he raised a radiant face and announced his second discovery of the "little tarrypin." Grapefruit followed him at a respectful distance, while Lares and Penates lingered shyly in the background when they espied us.

"And here's *Ann*," Waterloo explained, in great triumph, waving his hand in my direction. "We can make her tote 'im back to the house for us. She ain't skeered of 'em!"

"Quick! Tell me!" Richard Chalmers insisted, and his seriousness made me flippant.

"Age has nothing to do with it! It is entirely a matter of temperament!"

He laughed, quite like a boy, as he sprang down from the wall and extended both hands to help me.

I grasped only one of his hands, and that very lightly, as I stepped to the ground.

We joined the little band of hunters and thus formed a funny procession home. Mr. Chalmers and I were in the lead, his right hand gingerly clutching a most disinterested-looking mud-turtle, while, with the left, he attempted to help me over the rough places in the road. Waterloo was close at our heels, while the three little negroes, struggling with their giggles, tagged along behind.

The task of "toting" a mud-turtle fitted so ill with his immaculate clothes and intense dignity that I laughed every time I looked up at him. And he laughed. Perhaps we should have done this, even if nothing funny had happened, for the late afternoon was so beautiful, and everything seemed so happy. The birds were all making a cheerful fuss over going to bed, and the tinklings that lulled the distant folds seemed to me, for the first time in my life, joyous.

"I shall think of this scene the day you are inaugurated," I said, still laughing, after the mud-turtle had been deposited in an empty lard bucket and borne away by Waterloo and his retainers. We had

found ourselves alone for a moment in the shaded, deserted library.

"You'll be there?" he asked, turning toward me as I stood on the hearth rug and leaned my elbow against the white marble mantelpiece. As he had carefully wiped from his finger-tips the imaginary dust from the mud-turtle I had been studying his profile in the mirror. It was the most perfect face I had ever seen—unless—

My eyes quickly traveled to the little oval portrait of Lord Byron, the old-time idol of my beauty-loving soul. I used to kiss his picture good night when I was twelve years old!

I glanced back again to the living presence of beauty equally as perfect. His gray eyes were upon me.

"You'll be there—if I am ever inaugurated?" he asked again.

"Of course. But you'll never see *me*."

Outside there was a glorious sunset, red and yellow and orange. It was like a sea of blood and a sea of gold, with a wonderful blending of the two. The radiance was trying to steal in at the shaded window, and I started across the room to open the

blinds to its flood of glory. He put out his hand and stopped me.

“If you were there,” he said slowly in his deep, rich voice—which is, in itself, attraction enough for any *one* man—“if you were there, I should be far more conscious of *that* than of the inauguration.”

And the quick look which followed these words made a feeling of having been born again run in little zigzag streaks of joy to my finger-tips.

CHAPTER VI

NEVA'S BEAU BRUMMEL

MANY days have passed since Neva and her mother made their dramatic return from Bayville.

These days have seemed long to me, but short to Neva, for protracted meeting has been in progress—and she has had a beau swarm. The swell young clerk at the Racket Store, who says “*passé*,” most Frenchily, and manicures his nails; a fat drummer who sells lard and sings bass; a “wild” young man who drives a fast horse, which the villagers all discuss above their breath, and who also does some other things which they take care to discuss—but in whispers; all these have been Neva’s, besides Hiram Ellis, a young farmer whom she cares for most, but makes the most fun of behind his back.

I know that she cares for him, else she would never have counterfeited a swoon one hot night in church when the service held on an unconscionable

time and she feared that Hiram would become impatient and start on his five-mile drive to his farm, without waiting to escort her home, as was his custom when she happened to be unaccompanied by any of the "town fellows."

From her point of vantage in the choir she could see that Hiram was restlessly moving his hands and feet about, although he was seated on the back bench and there was the church full of perspiring humanity between her and the gawky object of her secret love.

The minister continued to exhort and to perspire, as he drank glass after glass of water; and, as the time for mourners seemed to draw no nearer, Neva took that night's destiny into her own hands and fainted—a stiff, peculiar faint.

Fortunately she was sitting close by a small door which opens directly out into the cool night air, so that her carrying-out could be accomplished without any ungraceful display of uplifted feet and sagging petticoats. Neva's artistic temperament could never have endured that!

The performance created small notice outside the choir.

Hiram was around at that little back entrance in a twinkling, his good-natured, sunburnt face a picture

of devoted anxiety. Neva was sitting on the steps shaking with a considerable degree of suppressed emotion, but not looking particularly ill, and insisting that her mother and Aunt Delia should go on back and hear the sermon to its end, if, indeed, it had an end. This they did, after seeing Hiram place Neva carefully in his buggy and start off home; but they failed to reach the choir in time to see the whisperings which had passed between two of Neva's rivals who sat there, and who were not unobservant of the peculiar nature of her fainting-spell.

"It wasn't like any faint *I* ever saw before," some one openly declared to Mrs. Sullivan after the service was over, whereupon the whisperings between the rivals were renewed; and several days thereafter the townspeople were frankly discussing Neva Sullivan's "spell."

In less than a week after the incident which I have just related, because there is absolutely nothing of my *own* happening that is worth relating, Neva ran over one day in a great flurry of excitement to consult my expert judgment as to what she should wear that night, as a young gentleman from the city had come down to see her and was coming out that evening to call.

"A young gentleman from the city! How exciting!" I congratulated her. "But I didn't know you knew any of the Beau Brummels up there!"

"That's the curious part of it," she explained as she sat down and panted a little, for she had run across the road and up our long walk. "I don't know him—never heard of him before. But he telephoned me from the hotel this afternoon that he had heard of *me* and had come down to see me on business. His name is Doctor Simmons, and he said he was very anxious to see me at once and give me some professional literature."

"Some professional *what?*" I asked, for she was talking very fast, and her enunciation at best is not like a normal school teacher's.

"Professional literature," she repeated, lingering over the words this time as if they were chocolate creams. "I told mamma maybe he is a poet. It sounded kinder like it, you know—him saying 'literature.' "

"I don't believe that poets carry around *professional* literature," I said, trying to let her down easy, for she is a sad little visionary—and somehow I have a sympathy for visionaries. But he was a *man*, a new man, even though he might not be a poet, so

Neva's solicitude concerning him was in nowise dampened.

"Well, that's what he said—'professional literature,' " she kept on flutteringly—inconstant little minx, when only a week ago she had disturbed "public worship" for the sake of driving home in Hiram Ellis' buggy!—"So mamma said I better come on over and ask you how I ought to dress to see him; and *oh*, how I ought to have the parlor fixed! You go up to the city so often, of course you know all the swell ways."

"I reckon I *do*," I said confidently, for I could see the chance that my hands had been itching for ever since I took the education of Neva in charge. "First, you must empty the room of candy-boxes, for if he is a prospective suitor, you see, all those boxes would frighten him away. He would think you are entirely too popular already."

"There ain't a girl in this town got half as many," she said rather wistfully, and I saw that the loss of the boxes meant bereavement to her. "Mine comes up to the top of the piano on *both* sides, while Stella Hampton's don't more than fill in under the bottom of the center-table!"

"But you must remember that he is a doctor," I

reminded her soothingly, "and they are awfully queer about *germs*. He might get it into his head that those empty boxes were regular nests for them—and they may be, for all we know."

"All right—if you say so," the poor child said sorrowfully, and I knew that her affection for me had been put to a fiery test.

"Then the McKinley picture! It ought to come down. It is dismal, somehow—it might cast a damper over his feelings."

"All right," she agreed again, much more willingly this time. "I know that Mr. Roosevelt *does* look more cheerful, so, if you say so—"

"But I *don't*," I almost shrieked. "We can put a tall vase of roses in the space so that no picture will be needed."

"Oh, that will be lovely," she exclaimed gratefully; "and I'll wear flowers in my hair."

"I believe black velvet ribbon will be prettier—just a band, you understand—no combs or fancy pins. Your hair is too pretty to be disfigured with ornaments."

Her eyes showed slow, but gratified, comprehension.

"And my dress—" she hurried on.

"A rather plain white one," I suggested fearfully, for I apprehended trouble there as with the candy-boxes. "You see, he'll not like to find you with a dress which has lace all twisted and *tortured* across the front—doctors are such humane creatures."

"I'm just dying to see what he looks like!" she exclaimed, her eyes dancing. "And I'm so much obliged to you."

"I hope you'll have a pleasant time with him," I started, when she looked at me in dismay.

"Oh, surely I'll see you again before he comes! Can't you come over a little later on, or maybe after I'm dressed—to see if I am fixed all right, and if the parlor looks swell?" Her big dark eyes held a flattering appeal.

"Why, of course! I'll be glad to get mother to run over there with me—just before time for him to come," and she gave my arm a gratified little squeeze and went away filled with charming anticipations.

As the mystic hour approached, mother and I threw crocheted things over our heads and started across the wide road which lay between the houses.

Drawing near the cottage we noticed a dim light bobbing about queerly just off the front porch, and mother clutched my arm in agony.

"Surely—*surely* they're not hanging Japanese lanterns out in honor of his coming!"

"Oh, I hope not," I responded, feeling not at all certain as to the course which Neva's enthusiasm might take. But as we clicked the gate and passed on into the yard we discerned the generous outlines of Mr. Tim Sullivan rising from a rickety, three-legged chair, which he had placed directly in front of Mrs. Sullivan's nasturtium frame. This frame was but a poor skeleton affair, having been built in the yard early in the summer for the flowers to clamber up on, but the fall of the leaf was approaching, and the flowers had refused to clamber.

In one hand Mr. Sullivan held a small, smoky lamp, the flame of which was entirely a one-sided affair; and in the other he brandished a paint brush. We knew it was a paint brush because it out-smelt the lamp.

"Come in! Come right in," he invited us hospitably, and as he gallantly approached to light us on our way up the walk, we caught a whiff of his breath; and the paint brush and the lamp faded into insignificance in the smelling line.

"Why, what are you doing, Mr. Sullivan?" mother inquired as she strained her eyes toward the

nasturtium frame and saw big splotches of green paint smeared about at intervals upon its wooden gauntness.

"I'm painting," he explained politely, as he held the lamp high above his head that it might cast its doubtful rays over the dark walk. "Just painting."

"But why paint to-night?" she persisted, doubtless wondering if this was being done in honor of the "city beau."

"Why, there ain't no time like the present, as I've always been told, you know, Mrs. Fielding," he further elucidated, his voice growing louder and louder as the distance between us increased, and as we gained the freshly-scoured front steps he moved back toward his field of operation and resumed his work. The wild sweeps of his brush gave, in the dim light of the unsteady lamp, the impression of some weird acrobatic performance.

We went into the house and found the feminine portion of the family in a state of conflicting emotions. Mrs. Sullivan was perfectly limp with rage over the misfortune of having Tim even mildly drunk and disorderly on the night when Neva's destiny might be hanging in the balance. Neva herself was perturbed, but radiant, and was praying

cheerfully that something might happen to check her father's artistic endeavors before the arrival of her beau. That Doctor Simmons was a suitor for her hand, impressed by her beauty in some mysterious and romantic manner, it had not entered into Neva's silly little head to doubt; and since one of her friends had seen the young gentleman at the hotel in the afternoon and had telephoned her that he was the swellest-est dressed man to enter that town since Heck was a pup, her expectations were soaring at dizzy heights.

I found that fortunately she had spent the force of her own swell longings upon the attire of her mother this time, inasmuch as I had so urgently recommended simplicity for herself. The glittering combs and bandeau were adorning Mrs. Sullivan's head, rising resplendent from divers unaccustomed puffs and braids and curls. Mrs. Sullivan's hair ordinarily wore a look of conventual severity, as did her hat, but there was never any congeniality between the two. In fact they were never on speaking terms.

"I done it to please Nevar," she confessed to me, smiling wanly at her reflection in the mirror, "but if I had a-had my way I wouldn't a-done it. I don't

like it. If I had a tubful o' wet clo'es on my head it couldn't feel no heavier!"

We were so cordially invited to remain and view the stranger from a speechless distance that we finally consented to do so, occupying straight chairs that would not creak and betray our presence as we sat at the front window of the room opposite the parlor and breathlessly awaited his arrival.

Presently he came and we were repaid for waiting. When I had mentioned him in the afternoon as being a possible Beau Brummel I little realized what an inadequate term I had employed. Beau Brummel with all his diamond-studded snuff-boxes was never rigged up to compare with Doctor Simmons. In stature he was tall, in demeanor grave, in color red-headed. His trousers were very light and his shirt was very pink, while a large diamond stud gleamed from his glossy bosom. Two other great stones were set in rings. His shoes were tan, but his hosiery was not; and his broad straw hat had birds embroidered in the band.

Neva received him nervously, her voice high-pitched and unnatural. Mrs. Sullivan bade us sit still while she tiptoed around through the back hall and up close to the parlor door, where she could

overhear the announcement of his mission. Her maternal anxiety justified this.

We sat an interminable time, it seemed, listening to Miss Delia Badger's low-toned conversation, which she felt must for politeness' sake be kept up; but there was no light in the room, and we were thus saved the pain of looking at her parti-colored hair, so it might have been worse.

After a long time Mrs. Sullivan came in. We could not see her face, but her voice had the most doleful droop I had ever detected in its depths, and she collapsed into the nearest chair.

"He's a fit doctor," she announced briefly, after a moment's strained silence.

"A *what?*"

"A fit doctor. He cures fits up at his hospital in the city. Somebody from here wrote him that Nevar had done had one. He'll give a gold-trimmed fountain pen for ever' name of a fitified person you'll send him."

"How unkind of the one who wrote him about Neva!" mother exclaimed in an indignant whisper, but I was unable to speak.

"'Twas some of them mean girls in the choir," Mrs. Sullivan pronounced lifelessly. "They're al-

ways so jealous of Nevar having the most beaus and the prettiest dresses."

"Well, it's a shame!" mother repeated wrathfully.

"What I'm worrying about *now* is how to git 'im off without Tim killing 'im," Neva's mother continued, still in an apathetic whisper. "If he could catch the nine o'clock car out o' town to-night he would be safe, but it's mighty near that time now. If he was to leave this early and Tim out there painting he would stop 'im and ask 'im his business. Then there would be a killing on the spot."

It was not clear whether Tim would kill Doctor Simmons for curing fits or Doctor Simmons would kill Tim for painting the nasturtium frame. But mother was all anxiety to avert either tragedy.

"Well, we'll run right on home this minute," she said, rising hurriedly, and her inspiration was so sudden and so happy that she forgot to whisper, "and ask Mr. Sullivan to go with us. Then Mr. Fielding shall make him a mint julep—while you explain to the fit doctor that he would better make haste back to his hospital."

There were grateful whisperings from Mrs. Sullivan and her sister.

"And you'll have to use a lantern to wave the car

down," mother turned back a moment to caution them, "for it's so dark they'll never see you if you don't."

But Mrs. Sullivan did not wait to tamper with the chimney of a lantern. The smoky little lamp had been placed, still lighted, upon the edge of the porch when mother had mentioned mint julep to Mr. Sullivan. His wife caught it up and bore it along bravely after we had crossed the road and entered the thick shade of our walk. She was closely followed by a very homesick physician, whose one desire was to leave this quiet little town, and an outraged but still admiring Neva.

As we gained our front porch mother whispered a quick word into father's ear and he hospitably bade Mr. Sullivan follow him into the dining-room, while she and I quickly turned and fled back down the walk to the front gate.

Yes, they had him safely down at the car track, and in a very brief while the car came along. Mrs. Sullivan made spasmodic little signals with the lamp, which brought the car to a standstill, and also brought forth a thousand rainbow gleams from the jewels in her hair. Doctor Simmons stepped upon that running-board with all the alacrity of a news-

boy with a bundle of "extras." He deposited his package of professional literature upon the seat in front of him, then turned and gravely lifted his hat to the ladies.

"Thank goodness!" mother said with a sigh of genuine relief as we watched the car pull out. Then she turned to me and for the first time that evening I could discern a smile in her voice.

"Ann," she said, trying to speak seriously, "when I see other women's daughters I know that I have much to be thankful for. You *are* a star-gazer and a poor cook, but, oh dear—you don't have beaus from the city."

"Touch wood before you boast," but she stopped and caught me by the arm.

"What do you mean, honey?" she questioned. "Has Alfred—"

"No, indeed. I don't mean anything except that I am at the age of Eve and—very hopeful."

"Well, you *know* what we all think of Alfred," she said, then stopped still at the lower step and broke off a dead twig from a rosebush near by. A shaft of light was shining from the hall and I could see that her face was very earnest. It was the first time in my life she had ever spoken to me of lovers.

"And I think everything of Alfred that you do—and more," I assured her, "but I am not in love with him. I might be—if—under other circumstances—I might be, but not now!"

She deliberately lingered at the steps, and we heard pleasant sounds coming from the dining-room.

"Eunice and I fancied that Mr. Chalmers looked at you—er, rather attentively the other day," she ventured timidly, as if to try to draw me out, yet dreading a little the answer I might make.

"That might have been imagination," I parried.

"But—we also imagined that *you* looked at him."

"Well," I answered with a laugh which I hoped would sound light, "haven't you just said that I am a *star-gazer*?"

With this admission I ran away up-stairs.

Yes, I had looked at him. And since then it seemed that there had been nothing for my eyes to rest upon that did not bear the impress of his face.

He had stayed through that long, perfect day, and had left when the cool, white night was at the zenith of its beauty. The cool, white night which, alas, had to be followed by a morning after! I had never, until then, felt this way about the morning, for it has always been my favorite time of day, my only

thought upon arising being an eager craving for the sunshine. But then, I had never known until that time just what an exquisite thing night could be.

There is a little sepia copy of the Sistine Madonna hanging across the room from my bed where I can see it the first thing when I awake every morning; and, on bright days there is a golden bar of sunlight which comes traveling in and across the ceiling until it falls upon the picture. I lie still and watch it until it has reached the Virgin's heart, then I get up and open all the windows to the light. It serves me in place of a clock, and much better, for it is true as to time, and it has no unpleasant way of striking a sudden and disenchanting note which breaks in upon my dreams.

My warning little ray of sunshine was casting a spot of intense light directly upon the Mother's heart as I turned and glanced toward it for the first time on the morning after Richard Chalmers' visit, but I was so tired that I lay still until it had traversed the entire length of the wall and settled for a moment upon the floor. I was not enjoying that stretching, smiling, lazy luxuriance which I sometimes indulge in after a too brief sleep. That is a pleasant sort of lingering upon the threshold of the day, but

this other feeling of mine was the deadening reaction which comes after a period of over-tension.

"You are a nervous freak," I said disgustedly as I finally jumped out of bed after a soft suggestion from Dilsey that I should find my bath prepared if I could only be induced to get up and go seek it. I crossed the convent-like little apartment which it has pleased my fancy to fix up as a sleeping-chamber and made for a mirror in the adjoining room, for there is "some little luxury there"—flowered curtains and Battenburg table-covers and punched score-cards. I wished to see if there were outward and visible signs of the change which was causing such inward tumult.

"You are a freak," I repeated as I looked in the mirror and noticed that my eyes appeared heavy and tired; and my tongue felt as thick as a Sunday morning newspaper. "It's a pity you can't keep your emotions stopped up in a vial and portion them out with a medicine-dropper—instead of *soaking* yourself in them!"

Dilsey had left the water running, as she has learned to do on mornings when I am unusually lazy, for no woman who has a domestic heart in her bosom can lie abed and run the risk of the tub over-

flowing and making a mess of the bath-room floor. I slipped my feet into some flip-flop Turkish slippers—if Turkish women have to wear such footgear as this I don't blame them for sitting still most of the time; but then they have the comfort of trousers, poor dears!—and went to turn off the water.

“Of course he thinks you are an absurd young person who openly tried to make eyes at him,” I mused, as I gave a savage twist that stopped that provoking sound of water wasting.

When I had imagined, upon first seeing him, that Richard Chalmers had warring elements in his character I was only saying about him the things I knew to be true of myself. “He does bad things sometimes, but he never enjoys doing them, because he has a conscience that will not let him.” This is my own disposition, and I fancied that it might be his, because his eyes bear a dissatisfied look, as if he did not come up to his own ideal of himself.

Alfred Morgan is entirely different. I do not believe that he ever had a morbid regret in his life. In his work he is fanatically conscientious, doing the best he can and knowing that his best is as good as any other man's, for he does not attempt anything unless he is sure of his qualifications. This does not

imply any lack of grief and worry when a patient "goes to the bad." He *does* grieve, sitting with his head between his hands, while his black hair is ruffled up like a shoe-brush straight across his forehead. Sometimes he softly repeats, "Well, I'll swear! Well, I'll *swear!*"—in a baffled, helpless sort of way, but you know that he has not been helpless where any other man would have been potent. And he never has the soul-eating remorse which follows the knowledge that one might have done better.

As to Alfred's *life*, I imagine that it is kept in the same condition of fitness that his body is—clean and wholesome, yet full-blooded and entirely normal. If he should meet red-robed Folly on a pleasant highway he would undoubtedly linger a while, taking off his hat politely and addressing her as Human Nature. He would shake hands good-temperedly as he left her and promise to come again some time when his business engagements would permit. But he would never give the matter another thought probably.

Richard Chalmers' cold face proclaims an asceticism that would call the prettily dressed little Folly "Sin," yet I fancy that he would linger—much longer than Alfred, no doubt—and leave the gay

fairy with a frown on his face, which would remain until the next morning, when he would throw his bootjack at his valet.

Where was I? Oh, yes, I had just turned the water off! It's a good thing I did, too, before this digression, or the house would have been flooded.

Again, what I have said of Richard Chalmers is also true of myself. I had lingered on the pleasant highways with a delightful Folly all day yesterday, which seemed to me in the cold light of day this morning a sort of Sin. A sin against good sense, I concluded, or against good taste, *especially* if he noticed.

"A horrid *young* idiot! Of course that's what he considered you were." I kept torturing myself with these thoughts until others more agonizing still came to torment me. Suppose he had not thought of me at all!

The dash of the cold water restored me to something much more nearly like my normal self, and by the time I had combed the tangles out of my hair and spoken to a pair of redbirds which live in a tree right by my window I was feeling poetry again. A shower of scattered cigar ashes, which Dilsey had not yet swept off the front porch, with two or three

red-and-gold bands which I had noticed on his cigars, set me singing.

"You're not an idiot at all, Ann," I commented, as I looked about to make sure that no one was near, then grabbed up one of these red-and-gold bands. "No *wonder* you have lost your head over him, for he is perfectly beautiful, and you always did get intoxicated on beautiful things.—And if *he* wasn't impressed too, his eyes were lying! No, they could not lie, because they are too lovely!"

I knew that the family would all be talking about him at the breakfast-table, which I found to be true, and they were so absorbed in their talk that they all, except mother, gave me a perfunctory greeting as I came in. Strange to say, they were not talking about his good looks.

"Well, he's had occasion to study the question in all its phases," Rufe kept on with the subject at hand as I slid into my chair and gave myself up to the charms of a breakfast food. "He's studied it in nearly every land. He spent a part of last year in—"

"I think one of the delights of wide travel is to be able to pronounce names of obscure places in such a way, that stay-at-homes won't know what you're

talking about," Cousin Eunice said, looking toward mother and me. She had not intended interrupting the masculine conversation, but Rufe stopped and listened to what she had to say, which proves that he is a model husband, I think—"Did you notice how he called Peru 'Payrhu' last night? Of course he's been there."

"I noticed the new-fangled way he had with several of his words," father said, a bit drily. "He differentiated between 'egoist' and 'egotist.' He seems to have been *there*, too."

"Surely," Rufe coincided so willingly that I was amazed. "But the quality of egotism possessed by this fellow is not the cheap, objectionable kind. He simply has unlimited faith in himself, and an unlimited ability of making other people do what he wants them to do."

"A tyrant, then?" father inquired with a half-smile at Rufe's enthusiasm.

"Not at all—a governor."

"Well, who is he and where did he come from?" mother asked, coming into the discussion in an abstracted sort of fashion. "I never heard of him until the last few months."

Then followed a long discourse concerning Rich-

ard Chalmers' past life, and his qualifications for the office which he might be called upon to fill—all of which fell like diamonds and rubies from their lips, for it was all creditable to him.

The look of strength, which had told its own story the first time I had ever seen him, and which had since then held me in the spell of a fascinated memory—it was all true, then! As I listened to the story of how the man had, by sheer strength and personality, raised himself from being simply a well-thought-of young lawyer, with a good deal of inherited wealth, to his present position in the minds of the state's best politicians, I felt that he must possess that steel-clad, relentless, yet necessary attribute—power.

Now, I revere power, whether in man, or beast, or automobile.

"Next to marrying it, the worst way on earth for a man to get money is to inherit it," father said, apropos of the story we had just heard. "It's bad for the man, and it's bad for the money."

We all laughed a little and agreed with father, then Rufe became aware of my presence for the first time.

"And Mistress Ann has not had a word to say

upon this interesting subject," he said chaffingly, looking around as if he had not seen me before, which in truth he had not, for he had been so absorbed when I came in that he merely nodded a "good morning" without detaching his mind from his discussion. "He was so visibly impressed, too."

"Shut up, Rufe—teasing her," Cousin Eunice commanded after she had looked at my face.

"I swear I wasn't teasing," he insisted more soberly. "I don't believe Chalmers looks at a woman once a year—he hasn't time for them, and besides, he's a cold-blooded devil—but he looked at Ann many times throughout the course of the day, to say naught of 'toting' home a mud-turtle for her dear sake. Then when he was leaving last night he asked me again whether the Fieldings were related to me or to my wife."

"Did you tell him the truth or did you take the credit to yourself?" I inquired sarcastically.

"No, I confessed that the beauteous blossom springs from the same tree that produced that perfect flower, Mrs. Clayborne. But I told him that the fact of my having 'raised' you invested you with a 'dearness not your due'—from blood ties alone."

"Well, she will have the honor of being looked at

by him a great many times this fall, when she goes home with us," Cousin Eunice said, then turning to mother she added: "And she will need a *bushel* of pretty clothes, Aunt Mary."

"I want one black dress, with a spangled yoke," I hastily put in, but was interrupted by little shrieks of disapproval from the two. "I—thought I'd have to look kind of *old*," I wound up, as they regarded me with amused surprise.

After breakfast was over Cousin Eunice gathered up her tablet and pencil and nodded for me to come with her.

"I want to look at your face as I write," she explained with a sympathetic smile, "for I am hopelessly stupid and commonplace. I can't even think of a surname for my hero that isn't already the name of an automobile."

CHAPTER VII

ALFRED

C OUSIN EUNICE'S new house in the city, which is really a very old house with the addition of all the wires and pipes and hardwood trimmings which we think we can't live without these days, is a love of a place. They bought it for the height of the ceilings and the size of the rooms, where every member of the family can spread out like a fried egg. But its especial glory is the drawing-room, a long, stately apartment all tricked out in the deepest, wild-woodiest green.

The walls and hangings are of the hue that our Mother Nature loves best, while the antique furniture is the color of chestnuts at Hallowe'en. There are dark-toned pedestals at intervals, holding jars of ferns, and the entire room presents such a perfect reproduction of a shady nook in the woods that Rufe declared at first he dared not venture into it, for fear of being snake-bitten.

There is a big leather chair over in one secluded corner, a chair which will easily hold the entire Clayborne family, and, on nights when there is no company and they are in a sentimental mood, the married lovers pretend that the room is the ravine in which they did their courting, and that the big chair is the old gray rock they were sitting on when he proposed to her.

This is a delightful make-believe—for them. Usually Waterloo and I are thrown upon each other for companionship, if it is late in the evening and Grapefruit has gone home.

He often begs for music, which I am always glad to furnish, or would be if his taste were not so very pronounced and so limited, and does not by any means include my favorite classics.

“You play ‘Ditsie,’ and I’ll play ‘Little Ditsie,’ ” his baby voice suggests, as he finds his French harp and blows a violent accompaniment. But if I tire of this and my fingers wander off into the mournful notes of the *Miserere* from *Il Trovatore* (another love of my youth) his harp and the corners of his mouth drop simultaneously, and he implores me not to play that “poor song.”

This has not happened very many times, however,

for there is nearly always somebody here. The Gordons frequently, and sometimes Alfred. They never come together, for whenever Doctor Gordon goes out anywhere at night Alfred has to stay at home and attend to the calls that come in. This is what a "cub" is for; then, too, it gives the Gordons a better chance to talk about him, which they take as much pleasure in doing as if he were their own dear son.

It is amazing how much they all think of Alfred. Not amazing, certainly, in any sense that he is not worthy of all the affection they bestow upon him, but I believe that it is seldom a girl has a young man thrown at her head so *unanimously* as I have Alfred thrown at me by our loving friends.

If he threw himself I should die, but he never does.

He is frank, and loyal, and sober-sided; just a little merry with me now and then, but for the most part going his even-tenored way and doing his work without any more fuss and splutter than—a fireless cooker. He never talks about what he is going to do, although his eyes are so deep and brown that I feel sure he is a dreamer.

He is the kind of man who seems to walk, with

deliberate yet sure step, into the things he wants. This denotes, of course, that he has sat up late many nights, smoothing out rough places in the road, so that his course might be dignified and steady when he gets ready to run it.

And, if Solomon—or whoever it was—told the truth about silence being golden, then Alfred Morgan is sinfully rich. He is timid, too, around women—*well* women, I mean; and I don't believe he would ever have grown so fond of me if he had not first known me at an age when I wore such plain linen blouses and soft silk ties you couldn't tell whether I was a boy or girl.

Even after my dresses began to sweep the ground I think he still thought of me as a boy. "You're a good little chap," he would say to me occasionally when I had done something for his comfort or pleasure; and I so entirely considered *him* a boy in spite of those six years between us that I seldom felt to see how my hair was arranged when I would hear his footsteps approaching.

Then, one day I had a rude shock about Alfred's degree of manhood.

Ann Lisbeth and I were in his private office waiting for Doctor Gordon to get through with a string

of patients which was overflowing the reception-room, and write out a check for her to take on a shopping excursion. (Things have changed with them since the days of their early married life, when Ann Lisbeth got a new dress only once a year; and then had to have it made by somebody who was owing her husband for a baby or a spell of measles.)

There was plenty of space in Alfred's room, poor boy, and I was sitting in front of his desk, idly fingering some papers and journals lying around in scattered confusion.

My attention was arrested presently by a small, oblong blotting-pad, with his name, Doctor Alfred Morgan, printed on the celluloid cover. The drug firms of the city sent such things out to all the doctors occasionally, but this was a particularly pretty one, with a little raised medallion on it—a picture of a stately stork approaching a cheery little cottage, with the fat, rosy, inevitable burden in his bill. The moon and stars were shining as they never shone on sea nor land, and there was a comfortable glow coming from the cottage windows, a glow of welcome, it seemed.

It was a happy-looking little picture, but it brought a curious feeling of uneasiness to my mind.

"Ann Lisbeth," I called, loud enough to cause her to look up from the magazine she was reading, yet not so loud as to be heard by Alfred, who was in the next room making a blood count. "Do you suppose they let anybody as young as Alfred do *this*?" I held up the picture.

"Oh, my goodness," she laughed, looking not so much at the picture as at my horrified face. "*Young!* Why, he has two pairs of twins *named* for him, besides a little girl whose happy parents are so fond of him that they made him name her. Her name is Ann Morgan."

"The Ann is for *you*," I cried, my face flushing.

"Nay, for you," she insisted, still laughing so that Alfred heard her and came in to see what it was that was so funny.

"Some of Ann's nonsense," she explained, and I slapped the blotter into my purse before he turned and looked at me.

After that I naturally began to treat Alfred with a good deal more respect, which he never seemed to notice.

It was about this time that he began finding a "good class" of patients who were trusting enough or reckless enough to let him operate on them; pa-

tients who remembered his work at the hospital, or who were willing to take Doctor Gordon's word for it when he assured them that Morgan could do the job as well as he himself. Of course this last happened only when there was an emergency case that Doctor Gordon could not attend to, or an out-of-town call that promised to have so little compensation that the elder doctor felt that he would not be justified in leaving the city for it.

And then it was that perhaps some old six-cylinder surgeon who happened to see the operation would go away and remark that he always knew Morgan was going to make good, for, by George! the fellow handled the knife like a veteran!

These stories never failed to bring a thrill of satisfaction to my breast, for Alfred is my old chum, and I have already mentioned in here my reverence for power.

Jean Everett likes Alfred almost as much as I do, and reads me long lectures upon the idiocy of my course. She religiously invites him out to her house when I am spending the week-end there and makes me dress up in absurdly coquettish things, in view of the fact that he has possibly seen me for the past seven days in the plainest of tailored clothes.

Jean has not grown up to be a beauty, that is, not a beauty that could be marked off by rule, but she has that indefinable something about her exquisite get-up which makes you suspect that all her lingerie is stitched with thread number 120. So dainty is she in her pretty blue frocks that a poetic he-cozen of hers calls her a Wedgwood girl, but Guilford calls her his twenty-two carat girl, because her heart is as golden as her hair.

I have been in the city only a little while—if I take the calendar's word for it; but it has seemed long to me, for the season of the year is that when everything is very dull. All the people who have country homes are reluctantly bidding them good-by and the signs of fall cleaning are disfiguring all the city homes. The theaters are publishing long lists of attractions which are coming later on, but now there is nothing.

The only politicians I have seen I have met accidentally up at the *Times* office—and they are all old, and wear long frock coats,—and look as if they chewed tobacco.

So, as I promised in the first chapter that I was not going to bother you with daily details and venison pasties, I suppose I shall have to close this chap-

ter without recording *one* thing of interest. I can assure you, however, that you do not regret the dullness of it *half* so much as I do.

But hold! Shall I forget Neva? Self-centered thing that I am! Because the last three weeks have been dreary and barren to me shall I not rejoice in the happiness of some one else?

Among the other unimportant things which I have done since coming up to the city I have helped Neva get installed in a boarding-school for young ladies. An expensive place, it is, where for a certain unnaturally large sum each year they teach you to broaden your a's, sharpen your eyes, and loath your home surroundings for ever afterward.

The matter had been under discussion for some days before I left home, and I set forth the pros and especially the *cons* to Mrs. Sullivan. But the humiliation of the fit doctor's visit was fresh and galling; and Neva's boarding-school experience would more than turn her rival's triumph into Dead Sea fruit. She must be entered as a student at the beautifully named college.

They came up together a week before time for the school to open, Neva and her mother, so that they could learn their way about the city a little and

also buy Neva some new music and a supply of winter clothes.

Now, Neva's songs, while new and silly, are sung in her buoyant young voice with so much gusto on the caressing words that they are a kind of actual music; a joyous sort of wholesome music, like the sound of the postman's whistle on a sunshiny morning, when you know that he is bringing you a love-letter! There goes my imagination again, for I never had a love-letter in my life! Not even a post-card, and it's been *three weeks*. Possibly dignified people do not write post-cards! Especially gubernatorial timber!

Now, what started this digression? Oh, yes, Neva's silly songs which she bought while she was up here those few days before school commenced. I started out to say that they did not seem at all silly to me this time. I actually caught myself singing them over and over again and found considerable beauty in one that was a plea to some hard-hearted beloved to make "ev'ry dream come true."

Yes, I was delighted with Neva's new songs, and Neva was delighted with everything she saw in the city: with the pure linen shirt-waists marked down to one dollar; with the vast, dim cathedral which we

would drop into to enjoy its solemn beauty nearly every time we were near it, after I found that Neva responded to its appeal; she admired the Egyptian mummies in the museum—the terrified delight of my early years; but she found the greatest joy in watching the fire-engines at work.

Mrs. Sullivan remained strictly at home after her first day of tramping the city streets, which she declared “was the death o’ her feet,” so that Neva’s bubbling accounts of the sights seen, when she would return to their hotel at night and try to cheer her mother up with her lively recitals, were by no means the least enjoyable part of the day’s program.

“Oh, mamma, the cathedral’s just *grand*,” she declared with enthusiasm, after her first visit. “I told Miss Ann that I *wished* papa had stayed a Catholic and had raised me that way.”

Mrs. Sullivan’s Baptist eyebrows flew up in horror, then her entire face settled into its normal look of hopelessness.

“Maybe you won’t be so glib to wish it at the Great Day of Judgment,” she said warningly, and the capital letters I have used were all in her voice.

“—And the mummies!” Neva hastened on, seeing that she had struck the wrong key, and her tones

were as light and frolicksome as her mother's were lugubrious. "I just love mummies!"

Mrs. Sullivan still refused to show a smiling interest.

"Well, I reckon they're all right, if Miss Ann recommends 'em," she said grudgingly, but with a little wonder depicted on her face; "still, I make it a rule not to fill *my* stomach too full of strange vittles!"

"Oh, mamma! They ain't things to eat," Neva corrected, struggling between her shame and amusement, then she launched forth into a brief explanation of embalming "after the manner of the Egyptians."

At the word "Egyptians" quick comprehension dawned in Mrs. Sullivan's disapproving eyes. Certainly she had read her Bible.

"Shucks! Is *them* what you're talking about? Well, I can tell you, miss, I knew all about mummies before *you* was ever borned! But you talked about 'em so gushing that I thought of course they was some kind o' new-fangled ice-cream."

"When I said that I *loved* them I meant that they are *so* interesting, you know," Neva said, hoping to mollify her, but her explanation proved a poor qual-

ity of oil poured upon the troubled waters of maternal understanding.

"Them's strange things for a girl to be going to see," she commented with pointed brevity. "—Men, women and children layin' there without *no* clo'es on—and nobody not knowing what they died with!"

But the fires! I don't know whether there was an unusually large number of such calamities during this period or not, but I had never had my attention so attracted to them before.

We happened to find ourselves almost in the thick of one the very first day we were up in the shopping district, and the excitement so appealed to Neva that after that no member of the fire department could have taken a more lively interest in the clang of the bell than she did.

On the last night of Mrs. Sullivan's stay, when she was already weeping over having to leave her only born, there was such a sudden and close clang of the alarm as would furnish Edgar Allan Poe with inspiration enough for four more stanzas of "bells, bells, bells."

Neva listened, counted the strokes, then scrambled around distractedly for the alarm card. The fire might be near enough for her to see!

“Well, Nevar,” her mother said, wiping her eyes and looking at her motions with reproach, “it is poorly worth while trying to educate *you*! You’ve been here a whole week and *ain’t learned the fire-alarm card yet!*”

CHAPTER VIII

ALFRED COLLECTS A DEBT

ALFRED MORGAN is one of those men whose backbone is built out of seasoned hickory.

I wish some of the poets would start the fashion of writing epics about the hero who goes through college without getting any money from home. To me he seems vastly greater than he who taketh a city.

Alfred did this, selling his pretty saddle mare for money enough to start in on, then borrowing some from the banks and winning scholarships the rest of the way. Incidentally, he has a very handsome chin.

Now there are two things that are an abomination to me, yea three—white eyelashes, a receding chin, and negro dialect written by a northern writer. The white eyelashes I admit are a misfortune, not a fault; the receding chin—well, I have wondered if that defect might be remedied by a little crinoline infused into the character, for without a doubt it is

a visible sign of a weakness that will sooner or later become visible. The negro dialect allusion has no business here, but I had written it down once in a note-book in a list of my pet abominations, and I wanted to work it in somewhere, so this seemed as good a place as any. However, the question of chin is the only one with which we have to deal to-night.

As I have above intimated, Alfred is dark-lashed and well-chinned, else we could never have been the friends that we are. That we are good friends is proved by the fact that whenever I want to go anywhere with him I ask him to take me along, and if there is any reason why I should not go, all he ever says by way of explanation is a brief, "No, I can't be bothered with you to-day, my dear."

It happened pretty much after that fashion yesterday afternoon, when I had lunched with Ann Lisbeth and he had mentioned that he had a long country drive to take. The sun was shining alluringly, and I had been feeling very dull.

"I believe I'll go with you," I volunteered, as we congregated around him at the front door and he began looking about for his black leather bag.

"I wish I could take you, for it's a beautiful drive," he responded, looking down at me with a

smile in his brown eyes, "but I couldn't be sure of getting you home before very late."

"Is the trip such a long one?"

"No; but I have some urgent business in the city afterward. I've brought suit for a medical bill, and am expecting at any moment to be summoned to the magistrate's court."

"How exciting! But I could come home on the car if you are detained very late."

"How disgusting rather!" he answered, ignoring the suggestion of mine about the street-car, but I saw him pick up a lap-robe lying near and brush a little dust from it. This was a sign that he expected me to go, for he scorns the comforts of a lap-robe for himself, even on the coldest days.

"It's hateful business," he continued, dropping the robe and searching around for the little broom which Ann Lisbeth keeps tied to the hat-rack, for both her doctors consider that cleanliness is godliness. "There will be a pack of lies sworn to in heathen jargon and hours wasted trying to make the scoundrels come to terms."

"Heathen? Literally or figuratively?"

"Both. The man who owes the money is that Hindoo I operated on last year for appendicitis, but

the circus he travels with is really responsible for the debt; so I'm going to attach a few of their lions and tigers and snake-charmers to make them settle up while they're in town this time."

"Why, Alfred! I don't know of anything this side of African jungles so thrilling. I believe I'll go with you anyway, even if I have to walk back. If the circus men should decide to pay you in lions instead of money you might need me to help herd them home."

He smiled as I reached for my hat.

"There's something in that," he said, "for they would willingly follow *you*." Then, coming a step nearer so that he could not be heard by Ann Lisbeth, who stood near by, he kept on, "I would trust you to charm anything that has eyes."

The telephone rang just as he spoke, and Ann Lisbeth went to answer it. I was surprised at the tone of his voice, for Alfred very rarely pays me compliments, and never one anything like this before. I was surprised still more at myself as I caught at this opportunity for a sincere, *masculine* compliment.

"Alfred," I said quickly, half afraid that Ann Lisbeth would come back before I could make him say

what I longed to hear, "Alfred, do you think I'm good-looking?"

I had the grace to blush as I said it, but the blush was not for Alfred. I felt that he knew the real question in my mind was, "Do you suppose Richard Chalmers thought I was good-looking that day we sat on the old stone wall by the orchard gate?"

But Alfred was simple and sincere always, and he saw in my question only the query any vain girl might put to a close friend. And into his eyes darted a quick look of pain and confusion. I wondered if my vanity lowered his ideal of me.

"You evidently have no knowledge of what I *do* think of you—else you wouldn't ask such a silly question," he answered gravely.

"I beg your pardon if—if I have offended you by my foolish talk, but I was only trying to make you say something pretty to me—you never do, you know." I was genuinely confused, myself, now.

"I thought 'pretty things' were unnecessary between you and me, Ann," he answered again, more gravely still.

"Every woman likes them," I said, trying to relieve the tension by my tone of lightness.

"Then I can gratify you—if that's what you want.

I think—that is, to me you are the most beautiful woman in the world!”

I was so stunned at his unexpected reply and the entirely *new* look on his face as he made it that I should have betrayed the thoughts which came surging to my mind if Ann Lisbeth had not rejoined us then with a commonplace remark about my taking a heavy coat along with me if I decided to go with Alfred.

“You’re going, aren’t you?” he asked casually, as if the matter were of no moment with him, but I saw how he reached for my coat as I nodded my head, and he bade Ann Lisbeth not to take up so much of his valuable time as she fussed a little over the careless way I fixed my veil, and insisted on my letting her pin it on properly.

The woods were beautiful, but I saw their beauty only in a vague, fantastic way. My thoughts were in a sad tumult, partly on my own account, partly on Alfred’s, for I felt that his strange words spoken at the hall door would be followed up by something far more manifest.

I knew him so well that there was no need for me to agitate my mind over whether his words and looks meant anything, as I had done in the

case of Richard Chalmers that day in the orchard when he had said "pretty things." Ah, he had said them so prettily!

How could I let Alfred know, without wounding him and spoiling our comradeship? Or would it be better *not* to let him know? To ignore his words and avoid such dangerous ground in the future—until he had forgotten them himself. Even the strongest, staunchest lovers cease to love after a while, when there is nothing for the flame to feed upon, I argued, and I set about steering away from any reference that might lead back to the perilous line of talk which had been so mercifully interrupted.

I espied a redbird—belated little wanderer—sitting on the fence by the side of the road, and I began telling Alfred of Mammy Lou's superstitions concerning redbirds and other little creatures too happy and bright to have even a tinge of superstition attached to them. But as I laughed at the notion I made a wish, and saw with joy that the bird flew away out of view.

There is a queer admixture of the fatalist in my make-up and, as the redbird flew away, carrying my wish with him, I had a feeling that that wish would

come to pass. It was a very simple, fervid, all-embracing affair—that I should see Richard Chalmers again very soon—and that he should *love* me.

The first time I had looked at that man's face I felt as if I had turned a leaf in the book of my destiny. When Rufe mentioned his name to me and I later learned that he was the same man whose face had formed the centerpiece of all my mental pictures, I fancied that Fate was about to keep her promise; and when he had lingered over saying good-by that night at home I felt as if my fancies might have a chance of coming true.

Then I had come up to the city and stayed for days and days, without hearing one word from him. This humiliated me until I was angry with myself for having ever given him a thought. I am of a proud nature which would demand far more of a man than he should ever *see* that I gave.

I was certainly not in love with Richard Chalmers as I drove with Alfred out that country road, but I was intensely fascinated, so much so that my thoughts flew to him with the flight of the redbird, and for a while I forgot that I was neglecting my task of keeping Alfred's mind diverted.

From the country we drove back to Alfred's

office and I stayed in the reception-room and looked at magazines while he was busy with some patients in his private office. It was getting well toward evening and the stenographer was beginning to arrange her desk in readiness to leave when Alfred came into the room and began to fume about the delay in being summoned to court. He suggested that I telephone Cousin Eunice that I would be late, which I did, but I found that my absence was going to make small difference to them, as she and Rufe were going out to a lecture, and I should be thrown on the society of Waterloo for the evening.

"Make Alfred take you on to Ann Lisbeth's, and Rufe and I will come by for you after the lecture," she suggested, which was an easy solution and would not cause Alfred to feel that he must hurry on my account.

He smiled when I told him of this arrangement.

"So you are going to be left entirely to me this one evening, it seems," he said. "The Gordons are dining out and bade me satisfy my hunger before I came home. I propose that we go on up to Beauregard's now and have dinner, then I'll take you home and let you tell tales to Waterloo until he goes to sleep."

"I'm not dressed to go to Beauregard's," I began, looking down sadly at my tailored clothes and linen blouse. I was very hungry, and Beauregard's is a delicious place. But my longings were cut short by a ring at the telephone, and I knew from the answers he made that Alfred was at last summoned to the magistrate's court.

"Jump in and go with me," he directed, as he began giving the colored boy and stenographer directions for closing up the office. "Likely I sha'n't be long; and we'll go to dinner as soon as they get through with me."

We drove to the magistrate's court and I sat in the car and waited for him. I waited while the darkness came on and the street lights flared up; I waited while everybody else was crowding into the homeward-bound electric cars—and I was still waiting long after the throngs had thinned out and the cars were carrying their scant loads, which means that all the world is at its evening meal.

Finally he came out, looking tired and disgusted, but he told me that the case had been adjusted satisfactorily to him, although the final settlement was not to be made until after the circus performance that night, when the business manager of the mighty

show could be freed from his duties and so present himself at the pleasant little affair.

"The mischief of it is that my lawyer and I have to go out to the show grounds and keep an eye on the manager," he explained, with a slightly worried look.

"And don't you know what to do with me?"

"Exactly! It's too late to send you home in a cab by yourself, and I can't go and take you now. What shall I do with you?"

"Why, take me to the circus."

He looked at me a moment, then looked at his watch and hesitated. "I hate to," he said, "but I don't see anything else to be done." So we started off again.

Fortunately the performance was nearly over when we got there, for it was the last night and everything was cut delightfully short, so I decided that I would rather stay out in the machine for that length of time, and watch the crowds swarm out to the street-cars than to be mixed up more closely with them.

Alfred drove up under a big arc-light and halted at the end of a long string of automobiles and carriages.

"You'll not be afraid here—and I'll be back as soon as I can," he said as he left me.

I pulled the rug up over me and reached back for a magazine I had brought, but the unsteady light on the printed pages soon caused my eyes to hurt, so I laid the book down again and gave myself up to the misery of just plain waiting.

After what seemed hours to me Alfred sent a little negro boy to the car with the message that I was to empty out his largest instrument case and send it to him.

"Maybe they have compromised on part money and a few baby lions," I mused, as I leaned back and gave myself up to another period of waiting.

I once heard Ann Lisbeth say that the only medical attention a doctor's wife ever gets is a sample bottle of iron tonic hastily handed her from a desk drawer once in a while, if she happens to be sitting near by and looking pale. I should not object to this, being healthy and seldom needing an iron tonic, but I do think the long waiting spells which any one who goes out with a doctor has to be subjected to would eventually make a woman so nervous that she would have to have some kind of tonic. I have registered a vow that hereafter, even if I start out somewhere

with Alfred in August, I shall take my furs along, not knowing but that it will be winter when I get back.

He finally came, however, and in looking at him I forgot the tediousness of my long wait. His eyes were flashing and his face was flushed. He looked very angry—and very handsome. Evidently he had not been suffering from cold as I had.

He had on his long overcoat, which seemed almost to drag him down, big as he is, with its weight; and the pockets were bulging dropsically—if there is such a word. His instrument case he deposited in the car, right in the way of my feet, but when I tried to move it I found that it would not budge.

“Are you tired?” he asked, as he began to crank the car.

“I’m tired and cold—and *hungry*.”

“All of which will soon be remedied,” and he smiled as he looked at me. “Ann, you never saw a man in my condition before in your life.”

“What?”

He had a hard time working his way into the car with those bulging pockets, but he finally got fixed satisfactorily, then he moved the heavy instrument case; and I gave my feet several relieved shakes.

"Very likely for the first time in your young life you behold a man who has more money than he knows what to do with!"

"*Money!*" I edged away respectfully to give the pockets more room. "Is it money?"

"Every pound of it is coin of the realm," he answered. "It is *nickels*."

"Alfred!"

"Those low-down scoundrels paid me in nickels." And his eyes began to flash again.

"What on earth for?"

"For pure cussedness!"

"And you had to count them all!" No wonder he had been gone a long time.

"I sat there like a fool and counted the instrument case full; then I dumped the rest into my pockets. The lawyer is sitting in front of his little pile now, counting it; and there is a small bag full to be sent to the magistrate to-morrow."

"Why, it's like a dream, isn't it? I never heard of so much money."

"And I never believed before that surgeons charge too much for their services—but now—"

We laughed all the way back to town; we drove up to Beauregard's laughing; we laughed as Alfred

slipped off his coat and the solemn waiter looked startled at the heaviness of the garment. Then we looked around leisurely to select a table, for it was late and the diners were few.

"Let's go into the booth," I suggested, nodding toward a small mahogany partition at one side and near the front of the restaurant. This compartment was built with some other purpose in view than acting as a private dining-room, for the open doorway is unscreened in any way, and the partition itself is only about seven feet high. I set down these uninteresting figures to let you know that I am a well-brought-up young person and don't go into private dining-rooms unchaperoned—nor should I have been here at all with any one but Alfred.

I had learned the comforts of this mahogany screen from having come here often with Cousin Eunice and Waterloo. We always make a bee-line for its shelter when we have him with us, for he fills his mouth so full that his mother always has to make him stop and unload. This is less embarrassing when there is a partition between her and the public.

The place happened to be unoccupied when we came into the restaurant that night, and Alfred and

I sat down with a sigh of mingled exhaustion and content. He began a lavish and extensive order which I curtailed materially on account of the lateness of the hour.

"We can't spend *all* our nickels to-night," I said, reprovingly; and we laughed a little over the nickels, at intervals, all through the meal.

Then we talked, or at least, I talked, which is usually the case when Alfred and I are together. I asked him questions about the circus people and the curious sights he had seen in the tent which was not open to the public. And he told me about the hideous Cossacks standing guard over their high-pommelled saddles, as the hurried process of packing went on, the long-haired ranchmen, who were tenderly laying away their guns; and the Hindoo woman who sat and glared at him as he handled the nickels which would mean months of a lessened salary for her and her husband.

"*Think* of the balloons and pop-corn and red lemonade those nickels represent," I said, still on the subject of the circus, as we finished our meal and left the table.

Under the influence of the good dinner, the soft lights, with their soothing shades on the table, and

the warm air of the comfortable room after my long wait in the autumn cold, I was beginning to feel deliciously sleepy, and was thinking with pleasure in how short a time Alfred could make the distance home, now that the streets were not crowded—when we left the booth and I looked around at the people occupying the other tables. I looked at them indifferently, as I waited for Alfred to put on his overcoat, my eyes traveling slowly around the room, until they stopped at a table close in front of where I was standing.

Just outside the partition and sitting so squarely facing it that I dropped one of my long gloves in my startled surprise when I saw him, was Richard Chalmers, smoking a fragrant cigar, from which he had stripped a dainty red-and-gold band, which was lying upon the newspaper he had spread out in front of him.

But he was not reading, and I imagined from his look that he had not been reading for some time, for he was looking straight at me with the same half-amused smile he had worn when he had sat on the old stone wall that day and told me that there was a vast difference in our ages. It seemed that he was quietly waiting for me to look at him, and, as our

eyes met, he rose at once, and came over and shook hands with me.

"I was waiting for you to come out, Miss Fielding," he said, after I had introduced the two men and they had reached simultaneously for my glove, which Alfred got to first—then Mr. Chalmers began to fold the paper he had not been reading, and made preparations to leave the place as we did. "I happened to drop in here a little while ago, and, fortunately, chose this table. Then I heard your voice—I felt sure that it was you—so I waited to see."

Alfred excused himself a moment and crossed the room to speak to a white-haired old gentleman at one of the tables. I recognized this old man as a well-known back number in the medical profession of the city, and had heard Doctor Gordon say that he was pitiably grateful for any attention which the younger fellows showed him. Alfred spoke a few words of congratulation on a recent address the old doctor had made at a medical meeting, they both laughed over a half-whispered joke, then Alfred turned to leave. An appealing hand was laid on his coat sleeve, as he allowed himself to be cornered by the old man, and a harangue ensued, carried on

in a quavering, high-pitched voice, with now and then a deep-toned word from Alfred.

I stood and waited for him and Richard Chalmers came closer to me as I glanced over into one of the mirrors on the wall and began to tie the big veil around my hat again, and to pull up my coat-collar a bit closer, preparatory to going out into the chilly air.

He dropped his voice and began to talk as rapidly as his lazy, southern drawl would let him. He seemed to have a good deal to say and he wished to say it all. I was in an agony of fear that the old doctor's harangue might not last long enough.

"Yes, the next week after seeing you I went East and returned only this morning," Richard's voice was saying, and, while the words made all the difference in the world to me, still I heard them only indistinctly. All I could take in was the fact that I was hearing his voice again.

"I reached the city this morning, and telephoned Clayborne about noon to ask him where you were. You remember you told me that you were booked to come home with them? I was very glad indeed when he said that you were at his house, and I should have gone out to see Mrs. Clayborne to-night

—I wanted to tell her about my mother and sister coming up to town next week for some shopping. They live in Charlotteville—eastern end of the state, you know—but Clayborne said that there was a lecture or something on for to-night. He thought you would all likely be at home to-morrow evening.”

“Yes—I think so. We shall be very glad to see you.”

“It was the merest chance that I dropped in here and heard you talking—I understood that something very amusing had happened at a circus.”

“Yes,” I said weakly.

“So I stayed to listen. You will forgive me—for I knew that it was your voice, and”—with a *wonderful* smile—“you see I am very fond of music.”

CHAPTER IX

A SHOPPING EXPEDITION

“**O** *RICHARD, O mon roi,*” I carolled this morning, but I confess that I carolled it as much in an undertone as the unfortunate aristocrats had to employ when they chose to give vent to their feelings by singing that song during the Reign of Terror.

I was up-stairs in my own room at Cousin Eunice's, brushing, shaking, smoothing, folding, and now and then mending a little ripped place in my clothes, for, during the last four weeks I have done nothing but wear them. Early in the morning, all through the day, and late at night, I have lived to maltreat those clothes. And they are showing signs of being weary and wounded.

It is a good thing, possibly, that mother and Cousin Eunice would not let me have the black spangled net that my soul yearned for, else there would not have been a spangle left to tell the tale by this time.

Cousin Eunice was in the next room throughout the time I was thus employed—that is, she was in and out, hence the undertone in my singing.

“Ann,” she finally called in a vexed tone, after a period of silence, “you’ll live to learn, after you’re married, that a man and his poll-tax receipt are soon parted.”

“It’s a registration certificate,” I amended softly.

“Well, what if it is? It’s eternally lost when they want it.”

She had spent the morning emptying bureau drawers, scratching through piles of old papers, peering under the clock, into a cracked vase, moving the piano and searching in the dusty lint beneath, and dazzling her eyesight by a scramble through a five-years’ accumulation of pink electric light bills—but no sign of the registration certificate. Toward luncheon time Rufe called her up and said he hoped she had not put herself to any trouble, for he forgot to tell her early this morning that he had already found the missing paper in his pocket-book.

“They have to register before they can vote, don’t they?”

I knew that they did, but I was in a mood to talk politics this morning.

"Yes. This is just a measly little municipal election, however."

"Oh, I know that it is not gubernatorial."

"I observe that you have improved your store of knowledge mightily—since that day we sat under the althea hedge." She came into my room as she spoke, and sat down on the side of the bed.

"Yes, I feel that I know all about the state of affairs now."

"Then I wish¹ you would tell me, so I can tell Rufe." She was tired out from her strenuous morning, and her head fell over among the pillows. I laid down the skirt I had been brushing and seated myself on the foot of the bed.

"What's the trouble?" I asked. "I thought the matter was very simple."

"You thought the matter was simple, you dear little goose, because our favorite piece of gubernatorial timber has showered you with devoted attentions this past month. It seems that he has declared his intentions toward you—so far as looks and acts go—but he is backward about his political doings."

"Then you have just not listened to what he has said," I denied stoutly, the spirit of the game strong within me, and the spirit of my admiration for him

much stronger. "Nobody could denounce Appleton more entirely than he does!"

"Oh, Appleton!" There was infinite scorn in her tone. "What decent person doesn't denounce him?"

"Then, what's the trouble?" I asked again. "Appleton stands for whisky; we stand for water—the affair seems quite clear to me."

"And Jim Blake stands for whisky *and* water—with a goodly dash of sugar. He's a kind of toddy for our split Democracy."

"But what has *he* to do with Richard Chalmers?" I asked, an uneasy fear clutching at my gay spirits.

"That's just what we want to know—before the *Times* can rally to the support of Chalmers."

"The *Times*!" I was genuinely aroused now. "Why, I thought the *Times* had virtually *made* Richard Chalmers."

"Well, the paper has boomed him because he has always stood for the right principles heretofore. But there is a grave complication about to set in now, it seems. Of course the people of this state are not going to stand for Appleton again—we are not Hottentots, and either a strong Democrat must come out, and stand on a strong platform, else we are going to have a Republican for governor."

"Well?"

"Well, the law-abiding faction is ready to support Richard Chalmers, so long as he does not compromise, but at the first evidence of weakening on his part—the vote goes to some *clean* Republican."

"And you are afraid that he will join Blake—in some way?"

"In a very clearly defined way. Blake is the most popular man in the state. He could put up a good fight for anything he wanted here—and he could throw his influence to Chalmers."

I traced the pattern of the counterpane with the end of the clothes-brush which I was still holding in my hand.

"I don't know a thing about it," I said finally, my tone and feelings far different from what they were but a few minutes before, when I had declared confidently that I knew all about it. "He has never once mentioned politics to me these last few weeks."

"Well, I dare say not," she said, straightening up and smoothing back her hair. "Imagine a man talking politics before Mrs. Chalmers and Evelyn! And they have been with you every minute that you and he have been together."

It was true. These last few weeks had brought

about a delightful state of closer personal contact between Richard Chalmers and me, a condition which he has seemed determined to make stronger and more pronounced by every means in his power—and he has the most charming means—but always under the supervision of his mother and sister.

Supervision? Good heavens, what an absurd word to use in connection with either one of those women where Richard is concerned, for they are truly as much slaves to him as if he had chains around their wrists and ankles. A worshipping slave is his mother, while Evelyn is so timid and fearful in his presence that she appears to be much stupider than she really is, which is stupid enough, in all conscience!

When I first discovered this mighty reverence in them for the man who is so kingly to me I felt that they must recognize in him that wonderful *regal* attribute, which so irresistibly attracted me. But I soon learned, for we were together constantly, that Evelyn fears and dislikes him, and the only time during those weeks of companionship that she displayed the slightest eagerness over anything was when she was urging me to accompany them on some pleasure party, where, unless I should go along

with them, they would be left solely to the companionship of her august brother.

"He's so much nicer when you're around," she explained to me one time with a look of pleading candor, when she was insisting that I go to dinner with them that evening. I had received pressing invitations from the three members of the family, but was hesitating on account of Mammy Lou's slogan.

Evelyn is an intensely inane girl, but not bad at heart, and it had not occurred to her that she was saying the wrong thing. Her mother, who is much more acute, came forward with a flurried palliation for Evelyn's thoughtless words. Richard is so dignified that Evelyn has never grown to *know* him, she explained, with what impressed me as undue haste; he is so much older than she, and has been away from home so much of recent years.

"It doesn't make me think any less of him to know that you are both deadly afraid of him," I smiled to myself as I ran up-stairs to change my dress. "But I am not in the least afraid of him."

His women are not at all like Richard, even in so far as length, breadth and thickness go. The quality in him which results in simply a splendid physique, in them tends toward heaviness, and I have

heard from his own lips that he "hates dumpy women." Yet he cares extremely for the handsome appearance which they make in their expensive clothes, and his cold dignity finds a pleased echo in their studied correctness.

Correct they both are, and stylish and *orthodox*, church and clothes being the alpha and omega of their conversation.

They are conventionally polite, whereas he is always superbly courteous; and Mrs. Chalmers can invariably be depended upon to do and say exactly the right thing. Evelyn passes muster all right, because she never does or says anything.

While Richard's mother can describe to the turning of a milliner's fold the latest foibles of fashion's fancy, she is complacently old-fashioned in her notions about other things, maintaining the faith in which she was brought up, namely, that all children should be whipped and all husbands watched, while women should say their prayers regularly and see that their corsets suit their figure. She quotes the Bible unendingly and is so morbidly "proper" and ladylike that I am sure she thinks, if she ever thought about it at all, that being burned at the stake was no more than Joan of Arc deserved for

being so immodest as to ride cross-saddle before all those fast and loose Frenchmen.

It fell to Cousin Eunice's lot to go shopping with Mrs. Chalmers and Evelyn; and to the hair-dressers, and to the thousand and one other places that out-of-town women always feel that they must visit when they are in a city for a little while. I usually fight shy of this phase of getting acquainted, not because, as you may think, that Richard was never along, for he was frequently; but simply because I *hate* shopping.

One morning, only a little while before they were to go back to Charlotteville, they asked Cousin Eunice to meet them in the city as they had some rather important purchases to make and desired her judgment on the matter. Cousin Eunice has known Richard's family ever since he shot up so suddenly on the political firmament, and she had shopped with them before, so she fortified herself for this occasion by putting on her most comfortable shoes and arranging her hair to stand the strain of a day's long crusade away from a mirror.

I had been invited to lunch with Ann Lisbeth that day, for there had been killed a fatted calf to glorify Alfred's birthday, and I pleaded this engagement

when I was politely urged to join, at least for a while, the shopping expedition.

"I wish you would come on in and see that coat I'm worried over," Evelyn rather insisted, as I was about to make my adieus at the entrance of one of the big shops, without even glancing at the bewildering array of new fall goods displayed in the windows.

Clearly Evelyn considered my seeming indifference to fashionable apparel a pose, for she continued, looking at me slightly aggrieved: "You evidently must be interested in your own clothes. Richard said last night that you were a feast for an artist."

My face turned a little red, but I meekly followed them on into the place. I might have told her that, while to *her* clothes were an end, to me they were a means—and no one is ever deeply interested in a mere means. Yet when the end is such a speech as *that* from such a man as that, it stands one in hand to take a little interest in the means. This brought about the frenzied overhauling of raiment which I instituted this morning.

Although it was still warm weather, the autumn stock of furs was already on exhibition, and Evelyn's attention had been particularly attracted by a

coat of short, glossy, and very expensive fur. One more sight of the attractive garment decided her.

"Well, I'm certainly glad you've made up your mind," Mrs. Chalmers said, as she opened her shopping-bag and drew out her check-book. She was busily filling out the blank after "Pay to the order of" when she suddenly stopped and looked up at Evelyn.

"I wish I could get this cashed somewhere else," she said in a low voice, "for Richard will criticize our taste unmercifully when he learns that this amount of money has been paid for that coat. He always looks over my returned checks."

"Oh, we'll just tell him that this was the entire amount of our shopping bill at this store," Evelyn answered easily, as if such a deception might be an every-day affair with them. "If he asks me I'll tell him that the coat cost only half of what it did."

"That's true, we can do that," Mrs. Chalmers said, looking relieved and going on with her writing. "But don't you forget to back me up in whatever I tell him."

After she had handed the check to the gratified saleswoman and again given directions about a slight alteration in the set of the collar she turned

to Cousin Eunice and said a word or two in explanation.

"Richard is such a critic," she stated rather absently, her eyes fixed on a handsome evening wrap hanging in a case close by; "when he knows we have paid a good deal for our clothes it seems to give him real pleasure to criticize them. He says Evelyn and I will buy anything a shop-girl shows us if she will only flatter us enough. So I am in for doing anything that will keep the peace. I consider it one of the first duties of a Christian."

Her mouth closed primly for a moment after her last sentence, but opened again almost immediately, for her eyes were still fascinated by the beauty of the delicate-colored wrap.

"Mrs. Clayborne, *do* you think I am too stout for one of those loose cloaks?"

I stood for a moment looking at the group and fingering the handle of my shopping-bag nervously. I was glad that my opinion of the evening wrap was not asked, for I should have given a random answer. I was wondering so many things in so short a space of time that my brain could not find room for words just then. Of all the different kinds of lies that one meets up with in life it has always seemed to me that

the lies women tell about the cost of clothes are the lowest class. What a deplorable lack of understanding must exist between members of a family when such lying is deemed necessary! I imagined mother or me trying to lie to father—about the cost of clothes!

The bewitching evening wrap was brought forth from its case and Mrs. Chalmers and Evelyn trailed away after the shop-woman to the dressing-room. Cousin Eunice and I sat down to wait for them. She looked at her watch, stifled a yawn, and then turned to me rather hesitatingly.

"I wonder if our friend, Mr. Chalmers, is a domestic tyrant?" she said.

I started, for this phase of the matter had not presented itself to my mind.

"He doesn't seem to be," I answered, with as much nonchalance as I could muster. "Of course every one can see that they both stand in awe of him; but I thought that must be because he is so extraordinarily—clever."

She laughed, then she looked at me more seriously.

"If it were only his cleverness they would not be hypocritical with him. And tyrants *do* breed hypocrites."

"Not unless there is hypocritical material—to start out with."

"I—don't know! If you loved a tyrant, and desired above everything else to please him, it might mean the ultimate ruin of even *your* frank character."

"I couldn't love a tyrant," I argued.

"You might not recognize the tyrant in him—until after you had married him," she said.

The same uneasy feeling that again came over me when I discussed his political prospects took possession of me then, and I started to ask her frankly what she had in mind, when Evelyn came up and said that her mother wanted Cousin Eunice to come and see her with the wrap on. So she passed on back to the dressing-room to help decide the momentous question, while Evelyn and I sat there and discussed the good points of the coat she had just bought.

Ann Lisbeth was sweet and wholesome when I met her an hour or two later—an admirable antidote to the disagreeable feeling I had brought away from the shops.

"Alfred doesn't know you're coming," she said with a bright smile, "he'll be so pleased!"

As is usual when the fatted calf is killed for a medicine man he takes that occasion to be an hour late—an emergency case at the last minute, or some one at the office that it took an unreasonable time to get through with. I hardly heard the excuse which Alfred made when he came in, but I knew it was true, whatever it was, and, as Doctor Gordon was not going to be able to come at all, we three went in and gave ourselves up to the joy of the occasion.

I was absently eating everything that was brought to me, and was thinking all the while how perfectly preposterous it was that Richard Chalmers—a man like Richard Chalmers—should have such weak-minded females attached to him; and I had just reached the conclusion that there could never, *never* be anything like friendship between us, no matter what there might be as an occasion for friendship, when the dessert was brought in, and with it a great, beautiful cake, iced in forget-me-nots.

"Now, don't you think I'm sentimental?" Ann Lisbeth asked with a smile, after we had used up all the adjectives that we had at our command.

"You see, I thought maybe Alfred's next birthday might be spent in London, or Vienna, or somewhere far away—and I knew that I was going to have you here to-day, Ann—so I told the woman who made the cake to be sure and use forget-me-nots. So when he thinks of us on his next birthday he will have to remember how much we all love him!"

All of a sudden I had that uncomfortable feeling that comes in my throat sometimes when I don't want it to, and I realized that if something did not happen to divert my mind I should certainly cry. Ever since his graduation Alfred had been trying to devise means for this course of study abroad, and I had known how much better his practice had been lately, but somehow, I had not thought of his going so far away so *soon*. Suppose Mammy Lou should have gall-stones again!

I wrestled for a moment with that awful lump in my throat; then I spoke, and my voice was natural again.

"Is this sudden 'wanderlust' the outcome of collecting all those nickels?" I asked with a laugh.

After we left the table Alfred and I went into the library for a while, and Ann Lisbeth stayed in the dining-room to keep her husband company while he

ate, for he had come in just as we were finishing, and declared that he was starved.

"Ann, I have a surprise for you," Alfred said, springing up from the big leather chair into whose depths he had lazily thrown himself a moment before. He sometimes took a short nap after luncheon, when he had been out all the night before, and I had picked up a magazine to amuse myself with in case he deserted me in favor of his siesta.

"A surprise?" He had given me a surprise the last time I spent the day at the Gordons'.

"A bully one. I found it down home the other day—last week when I was out there—while I was rummaging in a box of ancient books and papers. Wait, I'll run up-stairs and get it."

He returned almost immediately with a book in his hand, a ponderous old tome it was, with yellowed edges and time-stained leather covers, but I saw a name on the back which sent my pulses throbbing with pleasure.

"Moore's *Life of Byron*," I said, reaching out for it eagerly. Alfred had known that I wanted the book for years, and whenever he had been in a big city for any length of time he had always searched about for it, but had never come across a copy.

"It isn't Moore's *Life*," he said, sitting down beside me on the couch, "but from what I have been able to gather, by glancing through it, it seems to be a rather more intimate affair than even that. Besides the poems, there are a lot of letters and extracts from his journal; the entire correspondence for several years between him and a fellow whom he calls his 'dear Murray.' Guess you know who his dear Murray is—I'm sure I don't. Then there are some letters to the Countess G-u-i-c—"

"Oh, Alfred! Guiccioli! I'm so glad to get my hands on this book. You are a darling to think about bringing it up for me to read!"

"Oh, I brought it up for you to keep. It belonged to my grandfather, and I can give it to any one I want to."

I laughed a little at his simplicity.

"But surely you would not be such a barbarian as to let a book like this go to any one outside of your family. Boy, this is an heirloom! I never heard of just this edition before. The engravings in it are wonderful. It is a very valuable book. I couldn't think of letting you give it to me!"

Ann Lisbeth had come into the room for a moment, but as she saw us sitting together on the

leather couch and absorbed in the book, she had hastily left the room, closing the door behind her.

As I finished speaking Alfred glanced at the closed door then deliberately reached over and caught both my hands as they fluttered about over the leaves of the book. In my surprise they struggled a moment, but he held them—he has such big, warm, *capable* hands; no wonder people are trusting as to their ability—and thus it was, with our heads bent close together and our hands pressing down upon the passionate poems of the greatest passion poet, that I received my first declaration of love.

“Don’t you know that there is nothing in the world I own or could get too valuable for me to give to you, Ann?” he said, in low, tense tones that I had never heard from him before. “Surely you know what you are to me! The greatest privilege I could ask is to give you everything I have or shall have—a life of devotion—a heart, darling, that has always been yours! A world of *love!*—”

He came closer still, and in another moment he would have had his arms around me, carried away as he was by the force of his own feelings, but I drew back and he was arrested by the look on my face. His own went white with sudden misery.

"Ann! Surely you don't mean to tell me that I am already too late?"

"Too late?"

"That you love some one else!"

His face, pale and drawn, looked strangely unlike my genial, even-tempered Alfred. He was capable of great depth of feeling, then—besides being so strong, so fine! I had always had an infinite respect for him, and admiration, and affection! I had known that the strength of his nature had been tested and found *there*; and it was like the strength of oak, sturdy, deep-rooted, indomitable.

"I *so nearly* love you, Alfred," I cried, struggling between the pain I felt at his hurt and the bewilderment of my own confused feelings.

For the face of Richard Chalmers was between us, and his face, too, spoke strength. Strength of steel, cold, inflexible, even cruel, perhaps—yet holding such a potent attraction.

"—But you *quite* love some one else?" His voice was calm, although his face was even whiter than a moment before.

"I don't know—I only know that I am oh, so sorry for you—and for myself, too!"

He was still holding my hands in his strong clasp,

and they felt so wonderfully at home there that I never thought to move them—if I had never known that other man I should have loved *him* so!

“Ann, is it Chalmers?”

The question was frankly put, and as frankly answered.

“Yes.—But there is nothing yet—nothing has been *said*—still, I know—”

“Ah, I was afraid of that! That was what overpowered my determination not to speak of my love until I came back from Europe! I noticed something that first time I met him—then the Gordons told me of his attentions to you.”

“Yes,” I said. “But he has never told me that he cares.”

“He will. And I congratulate him.”

Alfred arose, as he spoke, and I laid my hand on his arm.

“This is not going to make any difference between us?” I asked appealingly. I felt that I could not lose my friend.

“Not in my feeling for you,” he answered, looking down at me with a look that I hated to see in his brown eyes—they usually met the world with such a level, untroubled glance. “If you should ever

change, or ever need me—you know that I will be there. But, dear, it will be painful to go on meeting you. I'm going away in a few weeks, perhaps, but until then—"

"I know. I'll stay out of your way," I promised humbly.

He leaned over suddenly and caught my face between his hands. He brushed his lips lightly against the coils of my hair.

"Good-by, *darling*," he said. Then he went out softly and closed the door.

CHAPTER X

ANN RECEIVES A CALLER

“**W**HOOPEE, what a pretty pitcher!” Waterloo cried admiringly, as he came down to breakfast this morning with the belt of his rompers still unfastened and a look of sleepiness in his brown eyes.

He followed his mother into the kitchen, as did we all, for the cook was late, and Rufe was anxious to get off early.

“Let me play with it. I won’t hurt it.”

I do not know whether it was the appeal in his voice or the wish to avoid a conflict, which always made her so nervous that she let the toast burn, which made Cousin Eunice pick the object under discussion up in her hand and silently debate a minute.

“Isn’t it a sign of the times when a child of his age doesn’t know a coffee-pot when he sees one?” Rufe asked, as he stood in the doorway and absorbed lots of space. When Galileo, or whoever it was, made

his famous remark about nobody being able to occupy more than one space at a time he had never seen a man in the kitchen before breakfast.

"I think it speaks well for his up-bringing," he continued (Rufe's I mean, not Galileo). "It shows how entirely we are on the water wagon here at this house."

"Lemme play with the coffee-pot," Rufus, junior, was insisting, dangerous signs appearing around the corner of his mouth. Cousin Eunice, who is observant, noticed these signs. It always gives her a spell of indigestion for him to have a crying spell before breakfast.

"Now listen, son," she said, handing the vessel over to him with a dubious look, "you must be very careful with the coffee-pot. Father went up himself yesterday and bought it for mother, because we are going to have so much company this afternoon that the other pot won't hold enough. So you just sit down on a pile of sofa pillows to play with it, then you can't drop it and make ugly dents in the pretty, shiny thing."

This arrangement proved so satisfactory that breakfast was finished and eaten before Waterloo could be prevailed upon to break his fast. A pocket

full of marbles poured headlong into the new-fangled coffee-pot had added very materially to its success as a plaything, and the music of this kept him engaged for at least half an hour after the cook finally showed up and took the reins of the kitchen work out of our relieved hands.

Cousin Eunice then went into the dining-room to give another look at the piles of silver, china and napery that are considered necessary accompaniments to civilized eating in public.

"Almonds, olives, mints," she said, touching the glass and silver dishes which were placed in a row on the sideboard. "Oh, isn't there always a gala feeling about eating out of wedding presents? And I'm going to use every pretty dish I have this afternoon."

"Is Mrs. Barnette such a big personage, then?" I inquired. The "Scribblers' Club" was going to meet with Mrs. Clayborne, and I had heard much of the visiting lioness just mentioned. Cousin Eunice is the kind of woman who takes her parties hard, and before the actual date of one, everything in the house, from Waterloo's scalp to the back kitchen shelves, is put in apple-pie order—as if a visit from the health officer were impending.

"Big?" Cousin Eunice was going over the row of dishes again, to make sure that she was going to be able to use them all. "Why, she speaks seven different languages, and has all her underclothes suspended from her shoulders."

"Mercy! Then it will take every piece of silver and fine glass you can muster to offset that, I'm sure."

"Naturally I must make an impression some way. If my book had been published and talked about all I should do would be to offer them a cup of tea and a wafer—and they would fall all over themselves for the honor of coming."

"Meanwhile, being humble and obscure, you have to serve flesh and fowl and coffee—say, don't you reckon I'd better be scrubbing out the coffee-pot?"

"Please do," she nodded, as she went on with her work while I bearded Waterloo and demanded the glittering object of his admiration. Manlike, he had already tired of the plaything, and was ready to scamper away with Grapefruit, for she had found a dead frog out in the yard, she said, and they would have a grand funeral if he would come on.

"Take him for a little walk now and save the funeral ceremonies until afternoon," I suggested,

"so he'll stay out of his mother's way during the party."

Then I poured the marbles out of the coffee-pot into his grimy little hands, the life-lines and head-lines of which constituted little streaks of whiteness, thereby proving them to be the hands of a Caucasian.

"There's one that won't come out," he informed me, as he pocketed the others and departed with Grapefruit.

I investigated and found a marble lodged firmly in the neck of the spout, a most tantalizing position it occupied, resisting coyly my efforts to remove it, yet protruding almost halfway into the body of the pot. I stood there fingering it until Cousin Eunice came to see what was the matter. I explained, and when she insisted upon trying her own hand at the marble's removal I reluctantly gave it over to her.

"Now isn't that *too* bad?" she finally exclaimed with a nervous impatience after she saw that it was useless to try any further. "It serves me right for giving it to him to play with—but I *do* hate to get him started before breakfast."

Each member of the family and the servants took turns at trying to get the marble out of the fine new coffee-pot, spending, all told, several hours of the

busy morning, and when Rufe came in to luncheon the story was poured into his somewhat unsympathetic ears.

"I knew he would do the thing some damage when I saw you hand it over to him to play with this morning," he said with a fatherly air. "Doesn't he tear, or break, or *chew*, or sprinkle over with talcum powder everything he can get his hands on?"

"Maybe you can get the marble out," I said, bringing the coffee-pot to Rufe, and he worked over it for a full half-hour.

"Oh, it's ruined," he said disgustedly, when he saw that it wasn't coming out. "Of course the coffee won't *pour*! It will just drop, as reluctantly, as tears at a rich uncle's funeral."

"Why, we hadn't thought to try," Cousin Eunice said, and I took the thing from Rufe's hand and sped with it to the kitchen sink.

"It pours," I announced triumphantly.

"Then your glory as a hostess is saved," Rufe comforted her.

"But who wants to go through life with a marble up the coffee-pot spout?" she persisted, with little worried lines between her eyes.

"Besides it will be sure to taste like marbles," I added.

The little worried lines between Cousin Eunice's blue eyes grew deeper in the early afternoon as the ices and cakes were delayed an hour in coming, and we found that Waterloo had sprinkled frazzled wheat biscuit all over the chairs and floor of the reception-room, just as the door-bell was ringing to announce the first Scribbler. Then she grew cheerful again when some of her best friends among the club members arrived, and only slightly flurried at the advent of Mrs. Barnette.

I stayed in the presence of the learned body long enough to hear with my own ears that they were not discussing anything too deep for me to understand, everything being spoken in plain English; but this happened to be a business meeting as well as an occasion for social enjoyment, so when the time for election of officers drew near I fled, fearing at least Esperanto—if not actual blows.

I was present once at a meeting of mother's missionary society when this ordeal had to be gone through with, and I shall never forget the injured expression and cutting accents of the secretary *pro*

tem. when she found that the office was not permanently hers.

The only untoward event that happened this afternoon (and that wasn't untoward through any fault of ours) was when Mrs. Howard, an immensely tall, raw-boned Scribbler, happened to speak in complimentary terms of dear Mrs. Clayborne's lovely sylvan room.

"I am *so* sensitive to rooms," she said, fluttering her rich lace scarf toward one corner of the apartment which she particularly liked, "and the least false note gets *so* on my nerves!" She was sitting alone upon a small sofa—alone, yet not alone, for Waterloo's little, but *loud*, mechanical bug was also sitting on the sofa, although his presence was unsuspected by Mrs. Howard.

This amazing insect is like love in the springtime, it only takes a touch to set it a-fluttering, for it seems always to be wound up. The heavy lace scarf hanging from Mrs. Howard's long arms and creeping over its back and sprawling legs was quite enough. It caught in the silken fabric with its sudden zizzing, clicking noise; and it climbed steadily upward, toward the lady's stalwart, but nervous, shoulders.

The meshes of the lace concealed the true identity of the intruder, and Mrs. Howard no doubt considered herself to be in the clutches of some poisonous and persistent spider. She shook her scarf; she tried to slay the monster with her book of minutes; she screamed. Finally, jerking the scarf from her shoulders and flinging it into the middle of the floor, she bravely trampled the "thing" underfoot, and thus she silenced it. Then she subsided upon the sofa, pale and exhausted.

"Let's have the sandwiches—quick," Cousin Eunice whispered to me, and I fled to the dining-room to see that everything was in readiness.

Under the genial influence of the buffet luncheon I found that they all unbent somewhat—enough to get down to commonplaces, even discussing such things as husbands, wall-paper and jap-a-lac.

I vibrated between the scene of gaiety in the house and the more enjoyable frog funeral, which was in full blast in the back yard.

Grapefruit had taken down one of the kitchen window shades to make a tent, under which there was an attractive tub of water, with several members of the bereaved frog family sporting heartlessly around in its muddy depths.

I had not thought of danger, although I had seen Waterloo dabbling in this tub pretty constantly during the last sad rites; but after the final Scribbler had departed and his weary mother came upon the scene, little Waterloo was ordered peremptorily in the house, and dire predictions were made.

"Oh, you'll be sure to have croup to-night," Cousin Eunice said dejectedly, as she followed Waterloo up the stairs and rubbed down his dripping little hands and arms with a Turkish towel. This task being finished to her maternal satisfaction, she turned to me with a look of unutterable weariness.

"Unhook me, Ann; my head is bursting. I'm going to bed."

So this is how it came about that when the door-bell rang at eight o'clock to-night there was nobody but me in fit condition to receive callers. Rufe was alternately filling the hot-water bottle for Cousin Eunice's aching head and racking his own brain trying to remember where he had put the wine of ipecac after Waterloo's last spell of croup. And the poor little darling was coughing in a manner that to me was frightfully alarming. With no thought in my mind save to help Rufe in his nursing feats, I had taken off my party frock and had slipped on a low-

neck Peter Pan blouse, with a fresh linen skirt. My hair was about ready to tumble and my face flushed with worry over Waterloo.

"Oh, the devil!" Rufe pronounced, when the penetrating sound of the door-bell reached us. But it was not the devil.

"It is Mr. Chalmers," I said, with a little catch in my breath as I heard his voice down in the hall.

"Well, you run down and get him settled," Rufe said, holding up a little bottle of dark-colored liquid to the light to read the label, "—then come on back for a few minutes and help me give the rooster a dose of this—will you? It always requires an assistant."

"Let's give the medicine now—then I'll dress before I go down."

"Nonsense! You look a thousand times prettier flushed and careless—as you are now—than you do all fixed up with your hair smooth. I don't like to keep him waiting long, for he might have come to see me about something important. You sound him, like a good girl, and if he doesn't want to see me particularly tell him that my family is ill and that you will entertain him."

I did take time to glance into the mirror to satisfy

myself that Rufe was not entirely wrong—then I ran down-stairs.

Mr. Chalmers was standing on the hearth-rug with his back to the fire (which Cousin Eunice had ordered kindled up all over the house when she realized that there was danger of Waterloo having croup), as I came down the steps, and when he saw, through the big doorway, that I was alone, he came to the foot of the stairs to meet me. The front part of the house was still open, and there was a beautiful moonlight. After I had greeted him I stood in the dimly lighted hall a moment, looking out into the night; then I went on into the long, beautiful room, which was filled with the scent of roses to-night, and, as we drew up before the fire, I shivered a little. There was just enough crispness in the chilly air to cause a deliciously shivery sensation.

“Well, you have no engagement for this evening, I hope,” he began, as I moved closer to the hearth and stirred the fire into a brighter blaze. “I should have telephoned, I know, but I was detained at the office until quite late.”

“No, there are no engagements to-night. Cousin Eunice has gone to bed with a headache and Rufe is nursing Waterloo through a spell of croup. By the

way, you'll excuse me while I run back a few minutes and help give the little fellow a dose of medicine?"

"Certainly—if you'll promise not to be long," he said with a smile.

"Oh, it will take only a little while. Then, when the invalids both get settled Rufe can come down—unless you are in a special hurry to see him about some mighty political secret. In that case I can send him right now, and play the part of nurse myself."

"Please do *not*," he answered, speaking much more earnestly than the occasion warranted. "I came solely to see you. Tell Clayborne he is not to disturb himself on my account."

Waterloo was breathing better and had gone to sleep by the time I reached his bedside again.

"I don't believe he's going to need the stuff, after all," Rufe said, unbuttoning his collar and beginning to make preparations to be comfortable. "Eunice says her head is a little easier, so I'm going to lie down here and read the paper until I'm sleepy. Chalmers didn't want anything special with me, did he?"

"No. He said you were not to disturb yourself at all," I answered, and he looked up quickly as he deposited his collar on the dressing-table.

"So? He came to see you?"

"That's what he says. He may later swear it by the inconstant moon. She is so beautiful to-night that you can forgive her for being inconstant." I rattled away to hide my trembling joy, brought on by the anticipation of two hours alone with *him*.

But Rufe's eyes were grave.

"Ann, don't lose your head over Chalmers," he said soberly, with that queer density with which a married man usually regards a love affair. (Oh, stupid Rufe! My head has been lost so long that I have grown delightfully accustomed to doing without it!) "He is a good fellow, and all that, but I don't know that he's good enough for you."

"Ann!" It was Cousin Eunice's voice calling weakly from the darkened room beyond. I went to her bed.

"Ann, is that Richard Chalmers down-stairs?"

"Yes."

"And Rufe isn't going down?"

"No."

"Well, listen, dear: he may propose to you to-night—I have seen that he was only waiting to get a good chance—but *don't* promise him anything! Until we know him better, dear!"

I patted her hand softly, then ran into my own room to get a fan that I might have something to toy with. There was a bottle of rich perfume on my table, my favorite lily-of-the-valley, and I drew the long glass stopper across my lips. Then I went to the window and looked out at the white light of the moon.

"Not promise him anything!" I said half aloud, the beauty of the night drawing a sigh of longing that was almost a sob. "Oh, don't they *know* that I would promise him my very soul if he should ask it?"

Richard was restlessly walking up and down the length of the long room when I came down again. He crossed to meet me and held out his hand, catching mine in his strong grip, just as if we had not shaken hands only a short time before. "So I am going to have you all to myself to-night?"

"Rufe said he would stay with his ailing family, if you would put up with my society."

"Ah! Don't you believe that I came just to see you? I was afraid that I should not be able to get a moment alone, so I was going to ask Mrs. Clayborne, as a great favor, to let me take you to the theater—or anywhere else that you preferred. I

have tickets here to the Lyceum, and there is a taxicab at the door. Shall we go?"

"Let's stay here," I begged. "It has been an awfully tiresome day. Go and dismiss the cab."

He looked gratified at my decision, then went out to send the cab away. I glanced at the bower of a room and felt a thrill of satisfaction. It was all so beautiful, and I love beauty.

"Shall I close these doors?" he asked carelessly, as he came in again and I heard the chug-chug of the cab as it sped away. "Shall I close these doors? It is really chilly to-night."

"Yes, I noticed," I said in some confusion, for I remembered that the closing of a door had meant a great deal to Alfred a few days ago. Ann Lisbeth had closed it, because she knew that he wanted her to; and he had looked to see before he had said a word. Evidently it is a way with lovers!

"I noticed that it is cold," I repeated, as he came over and stood near me without speaking. "My hands are quite cold."

I recognized the absurdity of this as soon as the silly words were out of my mouth, and I tried to think of something else to say quickly enough to cover my shamefaced silence, but nothing would

come to my aid, and I had finally to meet his compelling eyes with a frankly embarrassed little laugh.

"Let me draw your chair back from the fire," he said, after we looked straight into each other's eyes for a moment, "or, better still, throw something around you and let's go out on the little side balcony where Clayborne and I always go to smoke. It is a glorious night."

I went out into the hall and got a long, loose wrap. As he held it for me to slip my arms into the sleeves his eyes traveled slowly over the crisp freshness of the linen gown I wore. My back was to him, but I was watching him in the mirror.

"I have a worshipful reverence for virginity," he said at length, "even if it be only of a white linen suit. I have always wanted the first and best of everything. It is this entirely fresh and unspoiled quality of your beauty that has so attracted me."

We were walking out through the long French window which opens on to the balcony, and as we gained the shadow of a thick growth of vines at one side he stopped, putting up his arm to stop me.

"Ann," he said, with the same sudden directness that had startled me that day in the orchard when he had asked me about our first meeting, "Ann, you

have seen that—I am attracted? Dear, I don't want to frighten you, you beautiful little *young* thing," here he lost his self-possession, "but I love you, sweetheart—love only you—love you—*you!*"

His arms slipped about me, and tightening their clasp after a moment, he drew me very close, so close that his perfect face closed everything else on earth from my view. And his keen gray eyes became two points of steel that pierced through, straight to my soul, and carried with them a sweet potion that inoculated my being with adoration for him.

I felt his cheek brush close to mine, his thin, cold face transfigured; and, as if to prolong the exquisite torture of suspense, we both held apart a moment before our lips met full. Then—

I was so swept by the storm of strange and wonderful emotion that my senses failed to take it in at first—that Richard Chalmers was mine! He loved me; he was feeling the same joy and the same torture that were running like fire and wine to my brain. Even in the dim light my eyes must have betrayed some of this bewilderment to him, if his own thoughts had not been equally in a tumult.

"You are *sure?*" he questioned, after his passion-

ate breath had slackened a little so that he could speak. "Ann, this means everything to me. Don't let me kiss you like that again unless you are very sure of your own mind."

—But he kissed me again, and kissed—and kissed until his lips grew cold, and I felt suddenly so tired that I could stand up no longer.

Oh, divine rapture of senses and soul! Could I forget that kiss in the hour of death? I wished that death might come then, as we stood together in that first passionate embrace, our lips meeting in kisses of fire, our hearts throbbing in physical pain. Oh, to die thus—together! So perfect was the moment—so supreme the joy!

My head fell over, with a little droop of utter weariness upon his shoulder, and his arms loosened.

"You are tired," he said, in quick contrition, turning my face up to the moonlight. "Shall we go back into the house? I'm a brute to treat you this way!"

We passed in through the long window and walked over to the far corner, where the big leather chair is. I sat down, lost in its ample depths. Then he stood up in front of me and looked down with the calmly contented expression of one who is greatly pleased over a new possession.

"You beautiful little *young* thing," he said again.

"Young?" I felt so secure, so happy, when discussing the question of age with him now.

"That is all I'm afraid of! You may grow tired of me."

"You are afraid of nothing, Cœur de Lion," I answered with an adoring look that brought on another avalanche of caresses. "I have always called you that."

"Always? Since when?"

"Since that day at the gates of the cemetery."

"Ah! And I have never ceased for an hour to think of you since that day—and to wonder how I could make you love me."

"When all the time you were the man of my dreams. Your face told me that when I first saw you—cold as steel to all the world, yet strong as steel for me."

"You have never imagined yourself in love before, Ann?" he asked, after a little silence which he beguiled by raising each finger-tip of my left hand to his lips.

"No."

"I thought not. A woman doesn't kiss like that but once."

“—And a man?”

“I’ve told you that I have never cared for any other woman. That’s what makes me feel such an utter fool now! To think that, at my age, I should have let a passion take such possession of me—before I knew whether or not there was the slightest chance of its being returned!”

“Oh, love, how humble the little god makes us! When all along you have been *King* Richard to me.”

“Well, there was never a king who found so worthy a queen-consort. When are you going to marry me, Ann?”

We had strayed off the heights a little and I was taking a much-needed breathing spell in the less rarified air, when he sent my senses reeling again at the question. Married! To this regal creature, who is so splendid in mind, body and spirit! And he was asking me to marry him, me—simple Ann Fielding, a dreamer of dreams, who had never dreamed one half so radiant as this blessed reality! To live with him always! “The desire of the moth for the star,” oh, joy, the moth was going to reach the star this time! Greater joy! the star was reaching out just as longingly for the moth, and calling the tiny creature another, an infinitely brighter star!

"I hardly expected you to be in such a hurry about marrying," I finally answered, after he had repeated the question. "I have heard you say such cynical things about the holy estate—when you thought I wasn't listening. One time you said you thought passion consisted largely of not knowing what a woman looks like before breakfast."

"Sweetheart," and his eyes were very serious, "I am sorry for every light word I have ever spoken about marriage—since you have honored me so." Then teasingly he continued after a moment, "The thing I desire most on earth just now is to know what *you* look like before breakfast, sweet Mistress Ann."

"Do you desire that most? Then what next?"

"You know, love. My ambition is next—and all I have in the world besides you."

"You want to marry me and be governor of this state—now, on your honor, which do you desire the more—*Richard?*"

He threw his arms around me again, as I called his name, and stopped my mouth with kisses.

"Don't jest," he begged. "It is sacrilege to-night."

Then we strayed from the heights again, and fell to talking about his ambition, and from that to more

commonplace affairs still—how we were going to spend the next few days, and how we might arrange that to-morrow, Sunday, could be passed together. *Together*, that was all that either of us desired.

“I’ll come early enough in the morning to go to church with you,” he suggested, “then we’ll have luncheon at Beauregard’s, if we can get Mrs. Clayborne to go with us, and—”

“Mrs. Clayborne?” I asked in surprise. “What for?”

“Ann,” and he took my hand gently, as if he might be admonishing a child, “I consider it entirely out of place for a woman to go out alone with a man, even if the two are engaged. Evidently your mother has never given the matter as much consideration as I have always insisted should be used in the case of my sister—for I have seen you alone with this friend, Doctor Morgan, several times. When I happened to meet you in Beauregard’s the night of the *circus*,” there was a struggle here between amusement and sarcasm, “I thought, of course, he was some very close relative. But I find that he is only a dear friend, with whom you take long country drives—and who gives you heirloom volumes of Byronic poetry.”

"We have known each other since he first started to college," I stated, by way of defense, but I own with less assurance than I should have used if there had not been before me the picture of the scene in Ann Lisbeth's library.

"I think it would be well to return the book with a note saying that you had found it too valuable a gift for you to feel justified in accepting. And, of course, you understand that from now on *I* furnish you with every pleasure that it is in the power of a man to provide for the woman he loves. If you want books, you have only to let me know; if you wish to take a long country drive, you have but to call me. I'll even take you to the circus," we both laughed, "if your inclination is in that direction; but, little love, no other man must come near you!"

"You are inclined to be jealous?"

"Not at all! I am simply trying to avoid all cause for jealousy."

"There isn't any other man who wants to come near me," I answered truthfully, as I recalled Alfred's beseeching look when he had virtually asked me to avoid meeting him.

"Nonsense," he declared, so suddenly and so decidedly that I smiled with the pure joy of having

him jealous. Richard Chalmers jealous! Afraid that I might fall in love with some other man! "Nobody could look at you without being attracted. I am far from being a ladies' man, but I acted a fool for weeks last winter—because I had happened to pass you on a country road. When you were driving with another man, too!"

"That was because we had found each other," I said, running my hand through his soft, light hair, and dwelling on the proud privilege that was mine.

"—Well, you will be guided by my advice in this matter, I feel sure," he said finally, "and you are too clever a little woman not to manage to keep all other men at arm's length without betraying the secret of our engagement."

"Secret?"

"Yes, please, dearest! Let us keep it secret from every one save our families until this deuced nomination business is over. There would be a lot of talk, you understand, because I happen to be a little in the limelight now. They would be wanting to put your picture in the papers for all the other men to gaze at. I can't bear to see a woman's picture in the paper."

I laughed a little and agreed with him. This was

only another phase of his kingly character. Whatever is his must be *his*, with a fanatical exclusion of every one else.

“I called you Richard, Cœur de Lion, but it was a mistake. You are a sultan.”

“With only one love, my Nourjehan.”

CHAPTER XI

A DRAWN BATTLE

“**A**ND all the time the marble *belonged* in the coffee-pot spout!”

“How do you know? Who told you?”

Rufe and Cousin Eunice looked up from the grape-fruit which had been absorbing their attention. They always sleep late on Sunday morning, and, on account of the headache and croup of the night before, they had slept later than usual this morning. I had been up for hours and had already had a walk out in the brilliant October sunshine.

“Your Cousin Richard told me!”

My words were quietly spoken, with only a tiny smile that insisted upon creeping around the corners of my mouth, out of sheer happiness from speaking his name. But, quiet as they were, they electrified the two at the table.

“Ann! *What?*”

“’Tis true. The marble is placed in there, when the pot is being made—to keep in the heat, you un-

derstand. Richard always makes the coffee himself on hunting-trips, and—”

“Ann! *Will* you hush talking about coffee-pots? Tell us what you mean! Are you already engaged to Richard Chalmers?”

“Yes. *Engaged!*”

“Well, upon my word! And this is how the shy young creatures feel about the matter when the man’s back is turned,” Rufe said, starting up and pulling out my chair for me. “You ought to have your eyes cast down, and whisper the news with blushes and tears, you horribly modern young woman!”

But he patted my shoulder affectionately and said Chalmers always had been a lucky devil. Cousin Eunice stared at me a moment in silence.

“And you are very happy?” she asked.

“Yes. *Very* happy.”

“Then I congratulate you both.” But she did not come and kiss me, for which I was very thankful. I have a masculine dislike for scenes. It was for this reason that I sprung the news of the marble in the spout first.

She asked a few questions as to how it had come about, but, while she manifested no great enthusi-

asm, she was too humane to make any kill-joy reference to her request of me last night.

We finished breakfast and I pushed back my chair.

"Well, I must hurry and dress for church," I said, looking nonchalantly out the window, for I knew that this would be another bomb. I have always been a notorious heathen in my family circles. I usually spend Sunday morning in the woods with a book of poetry or philosophy—sometimes with two or three children from the village—but I *never* go to church.

The bomb exploded.

"Rufe, listen! Did you hear that? Going to church with her young man!"

"Well, it was his first request of me. I couldn't refuse it, could I?"

"Chalmers always has had a way of making people do exactly what he wishes," Rufe said, coming up to Cousin Eunice to kiss her good-by.

"I shall do as he wishes when I think it is right," I answered with some spirit, for it aroused me to think they should consider me an incipient "door-mat wife." "But of course he will soon learn that I am not like his mother and Evelyn."

"God forbid that he should ever make you like

them!" Cousin Eunice said, with so much fervor that I looked at her in surprise.

"You don't think that he made them—what they are?" I asked.

"I—don't know," she said, looking at me gravely. "He *is* masterful; but that is far from being a bad trait. I imagine that his attitude toward you will be just what you make it. Be frank and sincere with him always—just as you are with the rest of the world. And never let him make you do anything that will lower your self-respect. Many wives do not know the meaning of that word."

"But Richard will always exalt his wife."

"Yes. He will exalt everything that is *his*—simply because he possesses self-respect himself, raised to the n-th power. You will be the best-dressed, the best-housed, the best-established woman in your set. And that set will be wherever he chooses to place you. If he rises politically you will have a brilliant course marked out before you; if he does not you will still have a life of luxury, leading the smart set in Charlotteville."

"*Don't*," I begged, for she had spoken half in earnest about the life in Charlotteville. "You know how I hate just plain society—the kind that Mrs.

Chalmers and Evelyn love. It would be the extinction of me. Above everything else on earth I love freedom. But I also love the 'paths of glory.' "

"And, don't you see, dear child, that if you tread these paths with a man as much older than yourself as Richard Chalmers is, and especially a man whose disposition tends toward tyranny, that you will march to the music that *he* directs?"

"Well, if it's the music of his voice I shall bow my head and face the east whenever I hear it."

"Don't think that I am a croaker, but I am a married woman and older than you," she kept on, ignoring the extravagance of my last sentence, "and I may be able to give you some advice that will help you. You are a girl of an *intense* nature, very candid, very kind-hearted, but alas, very impractical. Having been reared as you were you are naturally self-centered and visionary, with a capacity for development, but as yet you have not reached any very high degree of serenity or *strength*, in spite of all the pencil-marks you put in your little volume of *Marcus Aurelius*. You have never had to practise sacrifice, patience, endurance—any of the virtues which make a *woman*, and without which life is a vain thing."

"All those things will come with—marriage," I said.

"With marriage where the man recognizes an equal partnership," she amended.

"Cousin Eunice, you have no idea of what Richard thinks of me," I explained, feeling very grave myself by this time, but wishing to set her right in regard to my standing with my lover. "Of course all of you still think of me as being ridiculously *young* and irresponsible, somehow, just because I have never, as you say, been put to any test. But Richard knows that I am a woman, capable of knowing my own mind—and he adores me—just as I do him."

"Dear," our voices had sunk low, and she came over and laid her hand upon my arm, "an adoring husband is a delightful thing—between the pages of a book. But you will need a man who loves and *trusts* you."

"I am sure Richard does that."

"I hope so. It may be that you can be a power for good in his life, taking a sincere interest in his work, and letting your own honesty be a kind of bulwark to him in the corruption which will be sure to assail him in his career. Never *hedge* with him, Ann, in

the little things; then he will have an ideal of his wife which will keep *him* from ever being tempted to hedge in the big things."

"You know it is not my nature to hedge," I replied, rather emphatically.

"You have never been tempted to," she answered. "I know that you would never come down to lying about the price of a fur coat, but luxuries happen not to be your weak point."

"Fortunately not," I said, with a little laugh, for the discussion seemed a waste of time to me. Still I know that newly engaged girls and brides have to listen to a lot of admonishing from their female relatives. I wished, upon this occasion, that I could take mine as indifferently as I once saw a bride take hers. I was a child at the time, but even then I was impressed by the absurdity of a conventional aunt giving, in a well-modulated voice, the usual advice about "bear and forbear," as the pretty little bride-niece sat by and allowed big, conventional tears to roll down her cheeks, while she kept on industriously cleaning her diamond rings!

"What is my weak point?"

I asked the question, half hoping that the talk would be steered away from the radiant subject, but

to my surprise I found that I was moving around in a circle.

"Your weak point is Richard Chalmers—now and for the rest of your life!"

"You mean?"

"I mean that you idealize him and worship him."

"I do," I answered proudly.

"And he thinks you are the prettiest little creature he ever saw, so he wants you for his," she kept on, analyzing my feelings and his with such a persistent accuracy that I found myself hoping my bridal advice would be given me by some one with less power of character delineation than is possessed by a lady novelist.

"Ann, when a middle-aged man marries a young woman, especially if the man has money, he is likely to treat his wife less like a wife than a—mistress. He showers her with violets, kisses, diamonds; but he neither burdens her with his troubles nor calls upon her for help. Now, this may be pleasant for the woman, if she be a certain type of woman, who marries a man to be 'taken care' of, but it is not conducive to character development. If the man is poor and the woman has to *cook* she has a better chance to enter the kingdom of heaven; but this is a rare

opportunity, for a young woman seldom marries a middle-aged *poor* man."

"But surely you don't think that I am marrying Richard for his money?"

There was no reproach in my tone; I was simply astounded that any one could take such a view of the matter.

"Certainly not in cold-blood," she answered. "I think you are bewildered—hypnotized by the halo which you have placed upon his head; and the glitter of the man's amazing good looks."

"The halo was already there," I corrected, but not so staunchly as my conscience made me feel that I should have done. Cousin Eunice has a disagreeably convincing tone in argument.

"His good looks, while undeniably *there*, are enhanced by the luxury with which he surrounds himself—his handsome clothes are a distinct asset. Can you deny it?"

"Certainly not! And his cigars are a joy. When I shook out my hair last night it was fragrant with the odor. He smoked, you know, out on the balcony."

"Ah, and then you thought that your hair was a halo—because it had the odor of his cigars in it!"

"Well, let's not get away from the subject of *his* halo. I believe you said that I placed it around his head?"

"You have done so, Ann! That halo has lain all the years of your life in your imaginative mind. You have kept it in a sacred chamber of your thoughts, while every tale of chivalry and every record of noble deeds has sent you to that chamber with more golden virtues to weave into the beautiful crown. Then one day you suddenly storm that room and snatch up the halo to place it triumphantly upon the head of the first startlingly handsome man you meet!"

"If I have had a halo I have placed it upon the head of Richard Chalmers, who wears it so gracefully," I defended.

"I admit the grace," she said, still speaking gravely. "But—*does it fit?*"

"Well, he will be here in less than an hour," I replied, looking up at the clock in some alarm, for I felt that I must be very beautifully and carefully dressed upon this occasion. "I want you to come in and talk with him every time he comes, and maybe you will tell me if you think I need to take any tucks in the halo!"

At half-past ten he came. I was still up-stairs when I heard the gate click, but I ran to the window and gazed down upon him in silent satisfaction. He threw away his cigar and swung briskly up the walk, the morning sun shining down upon his glossy hat, and changing it into an absurd kind of halo.

"How is my little girl?" he asked in a low tone as I met him in the hall. "Has it seemed a long time since last night?"

We passed into the drawing-room and found chairs that would not be directly in the line of vision of any one who might be crossing the hall in front of the door. He caught my hand and pressed it, but there was no sudden attempt at a stolen kiss. This was exactly to my liking, for, above all things, I am *artistic*, and I should not care for a lover who came in and kissed me before there had been time for any display of feeling to warrant it. Yet I am saying nothing against this habit in *husbands*.

"Have you been waiting long?" he asked, his eyes wandering approvingly over my dressed-up, Sunday attire. I wore a pretty pink foulard silk, with a tiny white figure in it, the cream lace yoke and bit of black velvet ribbon at the collar managing some way to bring out the best there is in my eyes and com-

plexion, for when pink and I are left alone we are not congenial. I felt a sudden sense of gratitude toward the woman who had made the dress and put that yoke and collar to it, for I realized that Richard would be quick to detect any incompatibility of colors. His eyes were still approving when they strayed down to my high-heeled black suede shoes! and I felt sinfully proud of my instep.

"I've been dressed half an hour. Do I please you, Cœur de Lion?"

"You are so entirely perfect that I know now I can never find jewels that will be worthy of you."

"Jewels?"

"Guess what I've been doing this morning!" He had leaned over closer to my chair as he spoke, and he again caught my hand and pressed it.

I smiled and shook my head.

"I've been buying my sweetheart an engagement ring."

"Oh!"

"That's what detained me. I couldn't find a stone that I exactly cared for."

He drew a little brown kid box from his pocket and touched the tiny pearl clasp.

"See if you think this will do," he said, handing me the opened box.

On the rich satin lining lay a big blue diamond; it caught the gleams of morning sunlight to its heart, then sent them back, with a dazzling radiance, to my eyes.

I looked up at him and had begun to speak when there was the swish of skirts at the door and Cousin Eunice came into the room. I closed the box in my hand and listened to what she might say to him in greeting.

"I came to warn you two benighted young people that it is high time for you to start to church, if you are still in the notion of going," she said, after she had shaken hands with Richard and remarked upon the beauty of the morning. "You can't rely upon Ann to know anything about church time," she continued, as he wheeled up a chair for her and we all three sat down again. "She hasn't been to church since she was in the infant class at Sunday-school."

"Ah! So I shall have missionary work to do—the first thing," he said, answering her light banter. Then, after a moment he reached over and took my hand, which was lying on the arm of my chair, in

his. The gesture was infinitely chivalrous and caressing.

"Mrs. Clayborne, Ann has told you of our happiness?"

"Yes. And I congratulate you sincerely." Her blue eyes were suddenly grave and tender. She arose and extended her hand to him in frank fellowship. He towered above her a moment as he gratefully pressed the welcoming hand, then she turned and put her arm around my shoulder.

"Ann is my little sister," she said, looking into his eyes with a steady glance. "You must always be very good to her."

"I expect to be," he answered gravely.

We showed her the ring and she admired its brilliant beauty.

"But, you conceited man," she said, with a really cousinly laugh as she turned upon him, "you must have bought this before she accepted you! She told me that the wonderful event happened only last night! This is Sunday."

"Oh, I happen to know Harper pretty well," he explained, mentioning the name of the best-known jeweler in the city. "I called him early this morning and he went down and we took a look through

the vaults together. This was rather the best stone I could find, so I waited for him to set it for me."

"Well, I must admit that I admire both your taste and your—precipitation," she said, smiling on him in the friendliest fashion.

I had not had time before to give the matter a thought, but it dawned upon me then that nobody save my imperial Richard would have had the temerity to call a rich diamond merchant from his warm bed on a Sunday morning and have him go forth with tools in hand to set a jewel. Surely he could do anything he wished! He possesses an undoubted power over men, and a high-handed, yet charming way of having people do as he desires them to. Cousin Eunice was already showing signs of weakening from her harsh judgment of the earlier morning. I remembered suddenly the slim, satiny horse he was driving the day I first saw him, and how he spoke only a word to her when she became frightened at Alfred's car. She at once obeyed the influence of his voice. Tyrant? He is no tyrant. He manages to get his way always by being so lovable and so charming that it is a pleasure to give in to him.

"Well, shall we be off to church?" he asked as

Cousin Eunice went out into the hall to meet Waterloo, who was just then returning from Sunday-school.

"If you prefer. I always try to take a long walk on Sunday morning. It makes me feel so good and *holy* somehow!"

He smiled. "And don't you feel that way in church?" he asked.

"No—except when the big pipe-organ is playing. I love the feeling of cathedrals, without any organ, but I know that this is only a revel to the senses, and it seems wicked to go—just for that."

He laughed outright. "So you think that people ought to get spiritual upliftment from going to church, do you?"

"I do. And if they get no such upliftment I think they ought to have respect enough for their Maker to stay away!"

"Their Maker? Are you so old-fashioned as to think that there is much *worship* in these churches—with their paid singers and their paid preachers and their heedless, gossiping throngs?"

"There is *some* worship. For the sake of those few I feel that the reverential spirit ought always to be carried there. But I am like you. I scorn hy-

pocrisy. The sight of a notoriously immoral deacon or steward sickens me with church-going for months. So I get my spiritual upliftment from going near to nature's heart. The birds and the bees are not orthodox—neither are they hypocrites.”

“Well, you shall show me some of these temples of yours about the week after next, when I have packed you off down home, and have speedily followed you there.”

“There are plenty such temples around here,” I answered. “We might go to-day.”

“Yes, but we are going to church this morning.”

“Why? You have just agreed with me that you gain nothing from listening to a man who is paid so much a year to explain to you something of which he knows nothing.”

“Good heavens, child! What a sentence from the mouth of a babe! I go to church because it is good form.”

“Then you are the one who needs a missionary.”

“Well, I'll promise to quit going altogether after we are married. I shall expect you and mother and Evelyn to keep up the appearance of respectability for the family.”

“Listen, Richard,” I said, standing close to him

and lowering my voice so that I might not be overheard. "I may as well tell you now, in the beginning, that I could *never* be a 'religious' woman the way your mother is. Our ideas on the subject are wholly different. I have a religion, but your conventional orthodoxy has little to do with it. And I shall not pretend that it has."

"Ann! I believe I have fallen in love with a little reformer. Will you be so good, madam, as to set forth your views?" He spoke in the lightest tone of jest. Evidently he had no idea that a woman possessed such a thing as views.

"Oh, it is a vague sort of belief; a dawning light of faith in the Eternal Wisdom, against which orthodoxy seems like a harsh glare which makes you squint your eyes."

"Upon my word! What would mother say to that?"

"She'll never say anything to it, for I shall never express such a thought to her. It is a useless waste of breath. But, Richard, if you love me, you will leave me untrammelled in such matters."

"My dear, you are to be untrammelled in all matters. My only wish is your happiness. Now run and get your hat."

"I'm not going to church with you for the sake of good form."

"What?"

"My conscience would hurt me all day."

"Of course you are not in earnest," he said, and the smile died away from his lips. "So hurry, dear. We are late already."

"But I am in earnest."

"Then you are a very foolish little girl, and I'll explain, as we walk on down the street, why it is well for me to show my face in the different churches around the city."

"You don't need to explain," I responded, but without stirring to get my hat. "I know that it will gain votes for you. But I don't approve of such methods."

"Ann, I have found that it will never do to discuss any kind of business proposition with a woman. So let us not waste any more time arguing the matter. Go and get your hat."

I had moved back from him a step or two and had opened my lips to state my position again, when Cousin Eunice, for the second time, broke in upon an interesting scene.

"Mr. Chalmers, Rufe has just called me to ask if

you were out here. It seems that there are some important out-of-town voters down at the *Times* office. They are anxious to see you, as they are just passing through the city and will leave at two o'clock. Rufe apologized for his cruelty, but he says it is important that you should come."

"Thank you very much, Mrs. Clayborne. Of course I shall have to go." He turned to me with sudden regret. Evidently he had already forgotten the slight difference of opinion. If he recalled it he would smile over my "stubbornness."

After he was gone I told Cousin Eunice of the occurrence.

"So soon?" she asked, with a smile for my earnestness. She did not consider his proposed offense such a crime as I did, but she looked serious as I told her of our little clash. "If the telephone hadn't summoned him I wonder which of you would have come off victorious?" she questioned.

"I—wonder?" I repeated absently, but the big diamond was flashing a reminder of his love into my eyes and heart, and, as Cousin Eunice turned and left me, I bent and kissed the stone.

CHAPTER XII

SHADOWS

AT home, back of the village, and extending so far away that I had never yet explored the uttermost reaches of it, lies a long, low hill. It is wooded in places with patriarchal oaks, so stately and far-reaching that they call to mind the tales of fairy forests, where knights in glittering armor rode through; or giants lived in hidden houses in the midst of them.

With the varying seasons this hill always seems to tell the silent story of the feelings in nature called forth by the changes. It speaks of joy in the spring; a gentle sadness in the summer; a glorious renunciation when the living green must give way to the gorgeous, though dying, red; and in winter there seems to be a spirit of patience.

Back of the actual summit of the hill, and partly shut in by its crest, which runs along half of its rounding curve, and skirted on the other side by the woods, where the oaks and chestnuts grow, is

an expansive depression, wide, rolling, beautiful. The ground, which is barren red clay, is thickly coated over with a scrubby growth, green for only a short while every spring, when there are millions of minute blue blossoms deep-set in its mazes. Later, it takes on a dull brown which lasts until fall, when it changes to a withered yellow.

A few small cedar trees, growing sometimes singly, sometimes in sparse clumps, are dotted around over the ground, but the only actual beauty of the place is its look of great space. It is the only spot I know of where I can see sky enough.

The sky! Yes, that is its charm. It seems to close down upon this cup with such a *nearness* that on summer days you can almost reach up and touch the clouds. And they are unbelievably lovely at such times. Then on other days, when the heavens are hidden by long, sweeping bars of heavy gray cloud, and the wind comes tearing over the crest, like a monster knowingly cruel and relentless—then the expanse of earth and sky indeed seem to run together; but the look of nearness is lost. The feeling of immensity is crushing; and you have the sense of being brought face to face with an unseen Presence.

Cathedrals hold this Presence, but tamed, trained and refined sometimes out of all semblance to its mighty prototype of the wilds.

Years ago, when I was a child, Cousin Eunice used to take me up here, for she was the first one of our family ever to discover the place. To be sure, it had always been there, and we had driven around it whenever it had been necessary, but nobody ever dreamed of wanting to take walks there, for it is a wild, lonesome-looking spot, besides being cut up in places by great gulches. In the exact center of the depression there is the bed of a prehistoric lake. The stone basin is there, with all signs of water, at a tremendous distance in the past.

"Isn't it *great!*" Cousin Eunice exclaimed, as we came upon the spot for the first time in our rambles. "Why, it is like being in another world, where everything is fresh, and free, and primitive. Let us pretend that this is our sacred garden, where we can carry only happy thoughts; where we can look at this immensity and learn the true value of things!" So we would often walk here, sometimes with Rufe; and then they would discuss the mysteries of Life and Death and Abiding Love.

On the Monday morning after the events of Sun-

day which I have just recorded, I awoke with an overpowering desire to get away to this "garden." I wanted to get out to where there was sky enough! To a place so immense that I could think it all out and get a true value of things! I wanted to dwell on the great happiness that has come to me; to take in, if I could, the unbelievable fact that I have been whirled away through the infinite spaces of human longing until I have come upon and possessed the star of my heart's desire. Star of my heart's desire! King or sultan, he is the "god of my idolatry,"—Richard Chalmers, my lover!

And while I craved this sight of a wild, free nature, I felt keenly that I should wish, on a morning like this, that the clouds and sky and trees should shrink into their proper place in the background of the mighty stage. They should move back and make room for me; and my triumphant ego should come and place itself in the limelight for me to review. I wanted to see myself at the age of Eve.

I explained some of this feeling to Cousin Eunice, in idiomatic English, after breakfast on Monday morning, but here was a hue and cry. It was the wrong thing for me to do, she declared. I should stay here and get better acquainted with my fiancé.

Besides, the first few weeks of a courtship were too dear and precious to be spent apart! I should die of homesickness for a sight of this beautiful city where I had gained my new-found joy!

I mentioned the matter to Richard when he came that evening—that I wanted to go home for a day or so anyway, then I might come back—and I found that he approved the plan most decidedly.

“I shall be out of town for several weeks,” he said, “and of course I don’t want you here in the city while I’m away.” He spoke with a half-playful air, but I had already learned to read his expression so well that I knew he was in earnest. “You don’t suppose for a minute I’m going to give any other fellow a chance to steal you away from me now, do you? Before I have had time to realize my good fortune?”

“I wish you would *not* talk that way, even in jest,” I told him seriously. “It implies a kind of distrust.”

He had been there quite half an hour when this took place, but he came over to my chair and kissed me for the first time. If Richard does treat his wife as a plaything, as Cousin Eunice suggested, I don’t believe he will find it necessary to shower

many violets and diamonds upon her. I believe that kisses will do the work.

"Distrust! Love, *little* love, don't say that again!"

"Then let's for ever bar discussions about any other man."

"I shall be delighted to! And, to make assurance doubly sure, I'm going to pack you off down home, as I mentioned yesterday. I'll be gone just a few weeks, and shall, of course, run down to see you the minute I get back to this part of the state. I am going by Charlotteville to tell mother and Evelyn the news."

"And we'll have letters every day."

"And I'll call you up whenever I'm where a long-distance 'phone is. Some of those little towns don't boast one."

He drew me close to him and we went together out to the little balcony where he could smoke. The smoke blew through my hair and lingered there. It seemed almost like a kiss from him that night, as I loosened my hair and began to brush it out.

"Oh, I *wish* it could stay there until he comes back," I whispered in agony, as I buried my face in the soft, odorous mazes; and thought of the long

days that would have to pass *some way* before I could see him again.

"I believe I'll go and get Neva to walk with me this morning," I decided, when mother told me that Mrs. Sullivan has been obliged, by maternal affection, to send for her daughter to come home and spend the week-end. "She will not disturb my musings."

I have been home several days now and have had an equal number of letters from Richard, dear letters, all; and after the receipt of each one I feel that same inclination to get out under the open skies with my joy.

This was Sunday morning, and there is a glorious Indian summer sun shining over the earth with that soft haze which only this season of the year gives. Of course I could not stay in the house.

When I rang the door-bell at the Sullivan cottage about ten o'clock I was admitted upon a scene of confusion which vainly tried to smooth itself out into a Sabbathical family-quiet upon my entrance. But the tension made itself felt in spite of the Sunday clothes in evidence, and the Bibles lying in readiness on the center-table in the parlor.

I mentioned the object of my visit, but Neva shook her head reluctantly. She would *love* to go walking with me, she explained, but she was going to church.

Her tone and statement were both so inoffensive that I was naturally startled at the storm which burst forth at her words.

"You *ain't*," Mrs. Sullivan contradicted flatly, displaying an unwonted degree of animation.

"I am," Neva answered, with a *Vere de Vere* repose.

"Your hats is all locked up," her mother suggested.

"Then I'll go bareheaded. They'll think it's a new style that I've learned in the city."

Mrs. Sullivan subsided into a chair and showed signs of tears.

"I see that it's poorly worth while to educate you," she began, but Neva interrupted her nervously.

"Oh, mamma, don't say *educate jew*."

"Now, did you ever hear anything that sassy? I don't see how *no* man could want you!"

Mrs. Sullivan's tone was tearful, but Neva's sensitive ears had already drunk in their money's worth of culture at the college for young ladies.

"There you go again! '*Want chew.*' Mamma, haven't I begged you not to go through life saying chew and Jew, unless you refer to mastication—or an Israelite?"

The tears actually started at this piece of filial cruelty, and Mrs. Sullivan turned to me for consolation.

"Now, I'll put it to you, Miss Ann, ain't that enough to make a woman wish she hadn't never saw a child? And do you know what this trouble is all about?—That common, ig'nant clodhopper, Hiram Ellis, that Nevar's almost broke her neck to see since she's been home."

"Why, I thought Hiram was in high favor—with you *all*," I said in surprise, remembering the occasion of the fainting-spell.

"He was, so long as Nevar was just a ordinary country girl," Mrs. Sullivan explained, wiping her eyes and glancing with a look of shame and reproach at Neva; "but do you reckon me and Tim's spending all that money on her education, and then let her turn in and marry anybody as *plain* as Hiram Ellis?"

"*Plain!* Well, I don't see as we're so *fancy!*" Neva said indignantly.

"Is she going to marry him this morning?" I

asked, and I noted then the extreme fussiness of Neva's hair arrangement. It bore a truly leonine aspect. She had on her school uniform, and so, except for the number of class-pins, she had not sinned excessively in the way of dress. But the hair gave me some misgivings as to her intentions.

"Ain't no telling what she'll do," her mother said hopelessly. "She's bent on going to church where she can see him! We've done all we could to keep her at home, even to locking up her hats and Tim carrying off the curling-irons in his pocket so she couldn't curl her hair. But do you know what that young'un done? I'll be blessed if she didn't hunt up her pappy's old tool box and git out his old *augur*—and curled her hair on that. Did you ever hear of a girl so deep in love that she'd *curl her hair on a het augur?*"

"Oh, mamma," she begged piteously, "don't say 'pappy!' And *don't say 'het!'*"

So it happened that I walked alone through the "garden." Alone, yet I felt that I was in a beloved presence, for Richard's last letter was with me. I sat down at the edge of the lake which had dried up in the Stone Age, and drew the letter out from its resting-place to read it over again.

Richard's handwriting is heavy, black, and almost as free from flowing curves as the chirography of a literary man. "Sweetheart," the letter began, and the firm lines which formed the letters looked very much as if he meant it. It was signed "Richard, R. I.," in humorous acceptance of the title I had given him. But perhaps the dearest thing in connection with the letter was the faint aroma of "Habana" which hung over it. I held the sheets up close to my face and shielded them from any vandal winds that might slip up and covet that sweet odor; and I recalled the smile in his eyes when he made me the promise that he would always be smoking when he wrote to me—that the letters might be more realistic.

"Don't tell me any more that you are a full-grown woman," he said, as he made the promise. "You are a child—but adorable."

He knew that I would be lonely, the letter stated, but he had left orders with a book-dealer that a batch of new books be sent out to me each week, to help while away the time. Orders had also been left with the florist and confectioner—and I must at once report to him any negligence on the part of these worthies.

"Of course you have already acted upon my suggestion that you return the Byron book," the letter continued, as if the mention of books had brought this affair to his mind, but I fancied that he had mentioned them rather as a means of leading up to this. "I know you would not keep it after I have shown you the impropriety of your doing so."

"Impropriety!" That is a word that I hate and avoid. No one had ever, to my knowledge, used it in connection with anything I have ever done up until this time. I bridled a little as I read it over. Somehow, out here in the wilds, I seemed to recall suddenly that if Richard is a gallant lover, so also is Alfred an old, and very dear friend—while the Byron book is a delightful possession.

"I shall not send it back," I decided, after a little reflection. "I shall stand my ground. He is not unreasonable, and he will sooner or later understand that I am old enough to judge for myself between things proper and improper! Ugh, how the words remind me of my prospective mother-in-law!

I hastily mapped out a letter in reply to this, telling him that I should keep the book, because I saw no reason, on the grounds he mentioned, for sending it back.

So intent was I upon this idea that I hastily jumped up from my sunny nook by the old lake and shook out my skirts. I would go home right now and write that letter!

I made my way across the breadth of the valley and leisurely climbed the hill, for the midday sun was quite hot. I paused and looked back once in a while, for the garden was so beautiful this morning.

There was absolutely no thought of defiance in my idea of showing Richard my viewpoint, for I did not dream that he considered the affair in any other light than the cut-and-dried distaste to "a young woman receiving presents from a young man to whom she is not engaged." He had not *asked* me to return the book. He had simply shown me the error of my way—and I had failed to recognize it.

I stopped again to look around at the wild beauty of the place before leaving it, then, with a little running start, I quickly gained the crest. When I had reached it I stopped once more, this time with a startled surprise, for I found myself face to face with Neva. I noted, with amusement, that she had possessed herself of a hat.

"Well, so you decided to come for a walk?" I

said in greeting. "How did you manage to get your hat out of the wardrobe?"

She stopped still in the path and her eyes suddenly met mine in a look of dumb misery. I first thought that the question might have been embarrassing to her, and was trying to think of something to cover it, when she spoke.

"Piled a box on a chair on a table," she explained with an effort, "until I could reach up high enough to prize the top off. 'Twas old and loose—and I still had the augur!"

"Neva! Think of the perseverance! And after all that, you didn't get to see him?"

At my words her mouth tightened at the corners, and her eyes looked very bright and dry.

"Oh, I saw him," she answered bitterly, after a moment's struggle. "He drove right past me while I was trudging down that dusty road to church. But he didn't see *me*. He had Stella Hampton in the buggy with him."

"Stella Hampton? Who is she?"

"She's the girl that sicked the fit doctor on to me!"

I tried to comfort her, but she was desolate.

"It ain't that I care so much about *him*," she as-

sured me, forgetting, in her misery, her boarding-school English, "but oh, I can't bear to face them at home. It's so terrible to be made ashamed before folks."

I agreed with her and insisted that she go home with me, not braving the ordeal of facing her own family until late in the afternoon, when they should have forgotten it a little. Tears of gratitude came to her pretty, troubled eyes as she joyously accepted my invitation.

Mother was on the front porch as we came up the walk and she welcomed Neva cordially.

"Ann," she said, turning to me and speaking in an undertone, "there is a long-distance call for you. The operator has rung up several times, then said that the 'party' would call again at twelve-thirty."

"Oh, mother!" I cried, with a great throb of pleasure. In a few minutes I should be listening to the sound of his voice, and that was a deal more satisfying than the aroma of cigar smoke in a letter!

"Little runaway, where have you been all morning?" I heard in his dear, drawling tones after the connections had been made and listening ears supposed to be removed from the line. "I've been trying for three hours to get you."

"I've been out for my Sunday morning tramp," I answered, a sudden overwhelming longing to *see* him sweeping over me. His voice sounded so near that I could scarcely believe that half the length of the state lay between us.

"Alone?"

There was no drawl to this query.

"No, not alone. I had your letter with me."

"When are you going to answer it, sweetheart?"

"To-day. I have already thought up some of the things I'm going to say to you."

It might have been thought transmission, or it might have been chance, but at all events, it is the honest truth, that the next question was the one in my mind.

"And what have you to say for yourself about Doctor Morgan's book, my lady?"

"A good deal more than is profitable to say over a long-distance telephone," I replied, hoping to change the drift of the talk. I felt that I could say my little speech better on paper than I could over the wires.

"Well, that has been troubling me a little, Ann," he said in his unsmiling voice, and I felt that his eyes were looking coldly into the space just beyond his

telephone. "I see that you are disposed to argue the matter. I had an idea that you had not sent it back, so I decided to ask you when I got you to the 'phone. Now, the question is, are you going to be guided by what I tell you in this matter, or not?"

No woman who has not experienced the agony can half appreciate the feeling of sudden terror that came over me at the cold sound of his voice. It seemed to have a threatening tone of *finality* in it that chilled me to the bone. I had such a feeling of helplessness somehow. You can argue with a man and cajole him and smooth his hair when he is where you can get your hands on him, knowing all the time that you are not going to let him leave the house until he has smiled the smile that won your heart; but, oh, the futility of trying to argue with a masterful lover over a long-distance telephone.

"Are you talking? I can't hear a word."

"I'm not talking, Richard," I answered. "I'm—I'm *thinking*."

"Well, I called you because I wanted to hear you talk. You haven't answered my question yet." Again that tone of cold meaning. A hundred thoughts a minute were flying through my brain. Should I say no and have a quarrel with him?

Should I say yes, and prove myself a coward—or should I lie to him?

If this were a tale of heroism, I should have a few ringing words of challenge to insert right here and then a quick curtain. But this is not a heroic story, it is only simple truth, told with regret and aspirations after a higher courage, yet still a true account of what happened in our back hall this beautiful Sunday morning. *I hedged.*

"I'll send it back, Richard," I told him, and he at once changed his tone and the subject of his discourse, beginning a recital of how he missed me and how he was going to cut short his trip up there and come on back. I scarcely heard the words, for I was trying to frame for my own conscience my sophisticated excuse. "I shall send it back if he *convinces* me that there is any just occasion for doing so," I pleaded to myself. But after he had said good-by and I started from the telephone I found mother's eyes fixed upon me in a kind of pitying wonder.

I flushed and looked away. Then I recalled Cousin Eunice's words: "Don't let him make you do anything that will lower your self-respect. Many wives don't know the meaning of that word." Wives? Dear me! I have been his fiancée only a week!

CHAPTER XIII

THANKSGIVING DAY

THANKSGIVING day—and I have written nothing since the middle of October! But you remember I told you in the beginning that my journal might be, not so much a record of deeds as a setting forth of wishes; and my wishes all come to pass so speedily these days that there is no time to write them down.

To be honest, I had no idea of bringing my journal up here to Charlotteville with me, when I came for this Thanksgiving visit, for I thought of course Richard would be here all the time and I should not find a moment dull enough for me to sit down and write. But, as it happens, I am glad that the book was slipped into the tray of my trunk almost without my knowledge, else I should be spending a lonely evening right now.

Let me see—shall I begin where I left off—that sunny morning when I parried with Richard across

half the state and lived to regret it? Or shall I begin with my entrée into Charlotteville and then jot down the past happenings as they come to me? The latter course strikes me as rather the better, then perhaps I shall not be tempted to give any one little occurrence too much space. Things seen in a sort of over-the-shoulder perspective are more likely to shrink into their normal size.

If I had snatched you up, my journal, the day that Richard sent me that exquisite chased card-case—a counterpart in pattern of his own sacred cigarette-case which I had once fingered with admiring reverence—I should have used up pages and pages of space, besides impoverishing myself in the way of adjectives. But I spent so many days dangling that card-case in front of me, as I stood before the mirror—using always my sparkling left hand—that before I had grown accustomed to the possession of it there came something even better calculated to take my breath away. A dull gold brooch it was this time, set with a green jade scarab—the little beetle bearing along with it a page of typed pedigree, showing the why and wherefore of its being. It in nowise detracted from the joy of possession, that these trinkets came in the nature of olive branches.

Yes, my sovereign was angry when I brought up the discussion of the book again, the Byron book, which I had promised to return, but with the proviso, under my breath, that I should be made to see the reason why first. I learned that he not only has the heart of a lion, but a little of that beautiful animal's kingly fury also when he is aroused. And he was aroused at what he termed my deception.

I made a clean breast of the matter the very first hour we were together again, knowing that I could make him listen to reason if I got him *literally* at arm's length. But I had to listen to some things, too, in that hour; coming off victorious to such an extent that he finally called himself every kind of high-class villain imaginable. Then, the next week this plethora of express packages.

So it seems that my idea concerning the warring elements in his character was not altogether wrong.

But to hasten on to Charlotteville! Mrs. Chalmers wrote mother several weeks ago that she wanted me to come for Thanksgiving, so there was plenty of time for the getting together of clothes which I now knew to be absolutely essential to my peace of mind when I should be with Richard. I never knew a man to pay such attention to these little

details. But what else can you expect when you are engaged to an Olympian god? Still—I almost wish sometimes that he did not lay so much stress on mere luxuries, for people can have a lot of enjoyment in life without them. Yet to Richard a big house, servants, expensive clothes, all are as necessary as the air he breathes, and he wants to make me feel the same dependence on them.

During the one little visit I have made in the city since our engagement he kept his promise of taking me for long country drives—but always in a big touring car, with a chaperon and a chauffeur! When I suggested that it would be more “fun” to drive that pretty horse of his and go alone, he assured me gravely that many things in this life which were good “fun” were not proper. So I said no more, but I felt a sudden sense of gratitude toward fate for not ever sending Richard driving past me last winter when I used not only to drive out the pikes with Alfred, but get out and go down on my knees to help him with a puncture. True, I wasn’t much help, usually being good only to hand him things, or *blow* on the patches to make them dry the faster—but I always liked to help, and he always let me.

But Charlotteville! Well, it is a small town in the eastern end of the state—a citified little place enough—where there are at least a dozen people who own handsome motor-cars; and the ices are always frozen in fancy shapes at the parties. Still it is a little town, where everybody likes to talk about everybody else—and the power-house shuts off the electricity at midnight.

I was glad when I found that there were other guests for this occasion, for I thought that would give me more time alone with Richard, and after I had met these guests I felt glad on their own account, for they are delightful.

Mr. Maxwell, the only other man, came down the same day that I reached here; on the same train, in fact, but neither of us knew this at the time, for I happened to be in the day-coach and he was in the Pullman.

When I reached the station here at Charlotteville, and at first saw no one on the little platform to meet me, I felt a sudden sinking around my heart; but, after the crowd had moved along a bit, I espied Richard's tall form at the extreme end of the platform. He was looking with a good deal of eagerness into the windows of the one Pullman car.

With him, and talking exuberantly, was a boyish-looking young man who had forgotten to remove his traveling-cap. Richard seemed to be paying no attention to this bright-faced youth.

I dropped my bag and hastened down the platform.

"Oh, she's disappointed you, old boy! 'Tain't another thing," the man in the cap was saying as I came up close behind them and slackened my pace. "I'll swear there wasn't a thing in that car that looked like a cross between Venus de Milo and—"

"Richard," I called softly, and he wheeled around in delighted surprise.

"Bless your little heart!" he said, so genuinely glad to see me that he forgot for a moment the presence of the other man. That is, I thought at the time he had forgotten, but I soon saw that he considered Mr. Maxwell too much of a good-natured fool to count. "I thought you had failed to come," he kept on. "Where the dickens were you?"

"I was in the day-coach," I answered, after I had shaken hands with Mr. Maxwell, when Richard remembered to present him.

"What?"

His tone was low and quiet, but his eyes spoke

surprise, and I remembered, with a sudden chill, that according to his ethics I had done almost a disgraceful thing.

"There were some people in the day-coach I—wanted to be with," I began by way of explanation, but I saw that this was making matters worse.

"What kind of people?" he asked drily.

"A woman. I got to talking to her when we changed trains at M—; she had *such* a headache—and two babies. The littlest one consented to let me walk him around some; and I fed the other one the remains of a box of chocolates. When this train came they got into the day-coach, and of course I went with them."

"Why 'of course?'" he asked again, but with an amused smile dawning in his eyes.

"Well, I was still carrying the baby! I couldn't go off into another car with him, could I?"

Richard looked at Mr. Maxwell and laughed perfunctorily, but I knew that in some way he felt that I had humiliated him. Mr. Maxwell did not laugh, although his is essentially a laughing face.

"I understand," Richard said finally, turning to me again and asking for my checks. "You have quite the appearance of a good Samaritan. Your

hair is—er—just a trifle ruffled. Couldn't you have managed some way to smooth it a little before you reached here? Evelyn always spends the last hour of a journey back in the dressing-room arranging her hair and powdering her face."

"Well, of course I know that is the ladylike thing to do," I responded, with something more nearly like sarcasm than I had ever used to him before.

Mr. Maxwell was busy taking his things from the porter, and as he exchanged his cap for a more dignified, but less becoming, hat, I noticed a scar on his forehead, high up and extending quite a distance toward the crown of his head. His hair grew queerly along the line of the scar. He seemed purposely to have detached himself from us for a moment, so I spoke to Richard again.

"Richard," I said, speaking low and rapidly, so that only he could hear. "I am sorry if I am a *fright!* But I just couldn't prink before that woman on the train. She was deathly sick, so I kept the baby all the way. Then she was *poor* and proud and—I didn't care about opening my bag and spreading all my silver things out before her!"

He laughed again.

"You are an extremist, Ann," he said. "But you

are not a fright. Only, you're so fine, when you're at your best—and mother won't understand."

"Of course not," I answered rather shortly; and the drive out to the house might have been a very quiet one if it had not been for Mr. Maxwell's irrepressible chatter.

I was grateful for the chatter at the time, still more so when we reached the house, for it helped my ruffled hair to pass unnoticed.

The feminine portion of the family met us at the front steps, and, as darkness was drawing on, I failed to take in at the time the full magnificence of the outside of the house. When I saw it next morning in the bright sunshine it struck me as being an oppressively massive, gleaming structure, with a great display of plate-glass doors and windows; and, instead of long, generous porches, as we have at home, there are several tiled vestibules that each morning are—no, not scoured, they are *manicured*.

Mr. Maxwell is a great friend of Richard's, strange as it may seem that two such incompatible natures should find so much in common; and, being heir to his mother's fortune, is such a desirable catch that Mrs. Chalmers frequently has him down here,

hoping that he and Evelyn will take a fancy to each other. Richard told me this, quite simply. Evelyn wears her prettiest gowns and uses her softest tones when he is around, but she is no more interested in him than she is in any other man. In fact, she is too well brought-up to display any preference in her marriage. Whatever her mother arranges for her will be entirely satisfactory.

And as for Mr. Maxwell—but that brings me up to a mention of the other guest here now, and it is surprising that I have not said something about her before, for she and I have been great friends from the day I arrived.

It is amazing that people can get so well acquainted in such a short space of time when they are staying together in the same house, yet when neither of them is what you would call “easy to get acquainted with.” I am not, I know, and I feel equally as sure that Sophie is the same way, yet you will notice that sometimes when two such diffident people are thrown together they will take a liking to each other right away.

It was this way with Sophie Chalmers and me. She is Richard’s cousin and lives in some vague place “out west.” She happened to be visiting some

of the other Chalmers relatives in a near-by town for a few weeks this fall and I think Mrs. Chalmers must have felt that if she had to invite her it would be less trouble to have her when there were other guests, so she asked her to come and spend the Thanksgiving holidays with them. If the girl had been less obviously a sort of "poor relation" (though by no means looking the part) or if Mrs. Chalmers had not tried so persistently to keep her in the background the "unexpected" which happened in this case would have been less surprising.

For Mr. Maxwell had no more than walked into the drawing-room and been presented to her than he fell in love with her; and, like most merry-eyed people, he fell very deeply in love.

Even their meeting was most unusual—dramatic, you might call it. And, as it took place at the moment of our arrival, it served to divert somewhat the attention from my disheveled looks, which had been such a shock to Richard. "Mr. Maxwell—Miss Chalmers," some one had said, as we all passed into the house and the tall, rather tired-looking girl unfolded herself from one of the big chairs drawn up close to the hearth. She showed no surprise as she extended her hand to the new arrival, but Mr. Max-

well looked at her for a moment as he held her hand in his; then he asked quite simply: "Where have we met before?"

The question was so earnest and so direct that the girl's face flushed, but before she could even start to offer a suggestion as to whether they had met before or had not, Mrs. Chalmers hastily put in that there was little probability of a former meeting, inasmuch as Sophie had not been in this part of the country in several years.

"We have certainly met before," Mr. Maxwell persisted, his eyes still fastened on Sophie's face, and running his fingers through his hair, along the line of the scar, as if that could help him in remembering. "I am certain of that. And I should surely not be so discourteous as to acknowledge that I have forgotten—except there are so many things hazy in my mind—since that night just outside El Paso."

I, too, was watching Sophie intently, as we all were, and I saw her eyes wander to the scar along his forehead. She looked away, but in another moment had returned to it again, as if the queer little white line held a fascination for her. At his mention of El Paso she gave a distinct start, but regained her equilibrium almost immediately.

"I must be a very common-looking person," she said with a little laugh, turning to me as she spoke, "for I seldom meet a stranger who doesn't know some one whom I am so exactly like that the resemblance is startling!"

We had all moved about a little from the positions into which Mr. Maxwell's first earnest words had petrified us, and Mrs. Chalmers was beginning to say something about taking us to our rooms, when that persevering young man spoke again. He had not moved an inch, but stood there in the middle of the floor, his eyes fastened on Sophie's face.

"It's not your looks, that is, your looks are not so convincing as your—your voice," he said, his expression still showing his bewildered surprise; but something in the girl's face must have pleaded with him to change the subject, which he did, easily.

"Well, don't you think the scar adds to my list of attractions?" he asked banteringly, as he turned to Mrs. Chalmers, who beamed approval upon him. "The girls all think I acquired it in some brave, though mysterious, manner—those who don't know that I got my sky-piece cracked in a wreck in Texas last year."

From that hour he began a course of small atten-

tions, minor courtesies, but none the less meaning, all of which have been calculated to make Sophie regard him with quite a degree of favorable interest, and if I am not mistaken none of these calculations has failed to hit the mark. But since their first meeting I have only once heard him refer to that unusual resemblance she bears to some one whom he has known; and I am sure he found the impulse then to speak so strong and sudden that the words were out before he had time to think, for Sophie so clearly disliked a mention of the subject. This proves to me that they have known each other in some mysterious manner, but as she has never told me the secret, of course I have never questioned her.

Last night at the dinner table was when it came about, and, when I think it over, it was a ludicrous happening rather than a sentimental or even mysterious one. Mrs. Chalmer's had been holding forth upon some Scriptural interpretations which her beloved pastor has recently made use of in his sermons, and, among others, the casting of pearls before swine was brought forward for discussion.

From the moment the word "swine" was mentioned Mr. Maxwell's face took on its bewildered look and he fixed his eyes on Sophie with that

same intensity of expression which they have worn so often this last week. Suddenly he seemed to remember what his mind was so evidently searching for.

"Swine! *Pigs!*" he blurted out, in such a startled way that we all instinctively stopped eating to await developments. "*That's* what I heard you—or the girl with your voice—saying that night. I remember it distinctly now! It was hot—heavens, how hot it was!—and there was a fierce pain in my head for some reason; but I heard your voice, just a short distance away from me, saying: 'This little pig went to market, this little pig stayed at home; this little pig had—' and there you broke off, because you couldn't remember what it was the third little pig had. There was a peevish child's voice crying: 'Tell little pigs! Tell little pigs,' and then a man's voice, trying to help you out. You asked the man, '*Do* you know what the third little pig had—or did?' But he couldn't remember either. He began saying the doggerel over again, 'This little pig went to market; this little pig stayed at home; this little pig had—'

"'Roast beef, damn you,' I hollered, for somehow I wasn't as near being dead as you thought. 'Roast

beef, but you needn't stand outside my door rehashing it all night. Then you and the man laughed in a surprised, though subdued way, and walked away from me, although I didn't hear the sound of footsteps."

His scar showed very white as he finished this queer little story; and he looked at Sophie almost beseechingly. He had the appearance of a man groping about in the dark.

Sophie, too, was clearly embarrassed, but said nothing by way of explanation; and, ridiculous as the incident was, not one of us even smiled.

There was a heavy, tense silence about the board for a moment, then Richard spoke.

"Upon my word, but this is interesting," he said, in a slow, sarcastic drawl. "Sophie, have you been traveling in vaudeville?"

As we left the dining-room one of the servants told Richard that there was a long-distance call for him, a bit of news which brought a frown to my lord's handsome face.

"Well, tell 'em I can't be found," he commanded briefly, as he caught the extreme tip of my elbow and began steering our course toward the library.

We usually had a few short minutes alone there after dinner.

"The operator has already told the party that you are here, Mr. Chalmers," the colored boy answered, looking embarrassed and trying to slink away into the back hall as soon as he could.

"The devil!" Richard exclaimed, under his breath, but he loosed his hold upon my arm as we reached the foot of the steps, and he suggested that I run on up-stairs and wait until I thought he had had time to finish his conversation, then come back and join him in the library.

"If you mix up with them in the drawing-room now you can't find an excuse to get up and leave when I have finished," he explained, and I smiled a happy assent.

Sophie, too, had gone to her room for a few minutes after dinner, and, as she heard me stirring around in mine, she called at my open door to say that she wanted my advice about something.

"Come in, by all means," I bade her. "I have lots of advice."

"It's about a dress for the ball to-morrow night," she said, holding over her arm a dainty gown of soft white silk. She spread the garment out upon my

bed, then stood off a few steps and looked at it. "Do you think it will do?" she finally asked.

"Do? Why, I think it's lovely!" I declared truthfully.

"Well, I want to look lovely," she answered, with a queer little smile, but as she sat down on the bed and picked up a bit of chiffon flounce in the neck of the gown, she looked up at me again, with an expression of almost tragedy in her eyes. "But I have no gloves that are long enough and clean enough to wear with this!"

"Well, wear a pair of mine, then," I began, noting that her hands and mine are about the same size, but before I could suggest this she had interrupted me.

"I didn't come in here for *that*," she exclaimed, rather haughtily, throwing back her head a little and looking me squarely in the eyes. "I wanted to talk with you a little because you don't seem so oppressively elegant and *rich*, you know—"

"I am not in the least rich," I assured her comfortingly. "Nearly all my gloves have been *cleaned*."

I hastily threw up the top of my trunk and scrambled around for my glove box.

"See!" I exclaimed, holding up a pair that she had seen me working on the day before. "They

look as good as new, but whew! it would take one of your Texas cyclones to blow the smell of gasoline out!"

"One of *my* Texas cyclones?" She looked surprised, but I fancied that she was pleased. "Who told you that I live in Texas?"

"Nobody that I remember; yet I got it into my head somehow that you live in Texas."

"I do. I live in El Paso," she threw aside the flounce of chiffon which she was still fingering and started to her feet. I was standing in front of her with the pair of freshly cleaned gloves in my hand. "Ann, I hate lying, and I am going to tell you something, for I can't keep up this deception any longer. I don't care what Aunt Ida says."

There was a quick rap at the door at this most interesting juncture and Evelyn stuck her head in.

"Ann," she said, glancing quickly at us both and seeming a little surprised to see us closeted together in this familiar fashion. "Richard has just had a long-distance message from the city. He has to go up there to-night on business and he wants to know if you'll let him come up to your door and say good-by?"

CHAPTER XIV

SOPHIE'S STORY

I HAD to lay my journal aside last night before I reached the really thrilling occurrence of Thanksgiving day, which was, strangely enough, neither the dinner nor the ball, although each was in its own peculiar way a decided success.

I have Evelyn's word that the ball was a success, for neither Sophie nor I attended it, albeit Richard had, at my whispered suggestion, sent Sophie a box of long white gloves from the city, getting them off on an early train that they might reach her in time; and sending along with this a box of roses—*Maréchal Niel* for Sophie, *La France* for Mrs. Chalmers and Evelyn, while for me there was a great sheaf of *American Beauties*.

But he did not come back in time for the ball, and I suddenly lost all interest in the affair as the last train out from the city that evening failed to bring him. Sophie had been suffering all day with a

frightful neuralgic headache, and, as night drew near, it became so much worse that she declared that she could not go to the ball. The lights and dizzy whirling around would be the death of her, she decided, so she dropped down into a chair in the library after dinner and said she would give it up.

"Then I'll stay with you," I volunteered, and, despite her own protestations and feebler ones from Mrs. Chalmers and Evelyn, the matter was thus arranged. There were always far too many girls at such affairs anyway, they all knew, so that my absence would really be a blessing.

Mr. Maxwell came into the room just as the matter had been thus satisfactorily settled and when he heard of the arrangement his face beamed with a kind of mischievous happiness.

"Now, that's what I call luck," he said, as the door closed upon Mrs. Chalmers' retreating form and left us three alone together. "I'll go with the ladies and stay long enough to see that Evelyn's card is filled—then I'll take a sneak, and come on back home to see how the headache is progressing."

His smile spoke immense approval of his own cleverness, but Sophie cut it short.

"You'll do nothing of the kind," she said de-

cidedly, looking up at him as he stood by the library table, a folded newspaper in his hand; "you'll stay and do your duty by the wall-flowers."

"Not I, sweet lady," he answered banteringly. "Life is too short. I'm coming back here and entertain your headache away!"

And he did. He came in at about half-past ten, for the filling up of Evelyn's card had been a matter quickly despatched, and he was in radiant spirits over having "jumped the game."

"Mrs. Chalmers didn't mind at all," he explained as he drew a chair up to the fire and lighted a cigarette. "I left her in a corner with a few other fond mammas and she even insisted that I should not go back, as Jim goes for them about two o'clock. All I'm to do is to go out to the stables and punch Jim in the ribs and wake him up in time. So we are going to have a jolly evening together."

"Oh, dear, what a pleasant prospect!" Sophie said, only half in jest, as her hand went up to her aching head. "Now, if I could just get rid of this one-eyed pain I might find life decidedly worth living."

"Isn't there anything we can do?" he asked solicitously, casting his cigarette quickly into the fire as if he thought the smoke might make her head worse.

"Can't Miss Fielding and I make you a mustard plaster—or something?"

"There is a little bottle of stuff in my bag up-stairs that sometimes acts like magic in a case like this," she finally said with some hesitancy, and I realized that she was hesitating because she disliked the idea of having any one fussing over her. She is one of these capable creatures who seldom ask even a small service of any one.

"Let me run and get it," I said starting up and resolving that I should get the bottle, hand it in to Mr. Maxwell at the door, then betake myself off to my own room and leave them alone together. I imagined that he would enjoy the privilege of hunting about to get her a glass and a spoon himself. And it would make them feel more at home with each other for him to be rendering her these little services.

I went to Sophie's room and found a bag where she had told me to look, in the closet on the lower shelf. I caught it up and moved across to the bed, where I sat down and deposited it by my side; then I began a wrestling match with the most obstinate catch that it has ever been my ill-fortune to come across on an alligator-skin bag.

"I'll just have to take it down and get Mr. Max-

well to open it," I finally decided, after I had worked with the thing until my strength and patience were both exhausted. "It is provoking to see the ease with which a man can subdue a thing like this after a woman has broken off all her best-looking fingernails over the task."

So I caught the bag up in one hand and my trailing skirts in the other and wended my way back to the library. My load was quite heavy, heavier than an ordinary traveling-bag I remembered afterward; and in struggling with the lock I had at one time pulled slightly apart an end of the stubborn opening. A whiff of drugs was borne to me in that instant—a kind of combination of odors, none of which I knew by name, but they were all strikingly familiar, for they were exactly like the smells in Alfred's small black instrument case.

"I hope you don't take all these different kinds of dope for your headaches," I thought with a quick little feeling of contempt, for I don't have much patience with the headache-powder habit. I learned this contempt from Alfred, of course.

Mr. Maxwell was alone in the library when I returned and told me that Sophie had gone to get a glass of hot water.

"She says that is all she ever takes for these spells of neuralgia," he said, holding out his hand for the bag, when I explained to him about the fastening. "But there is a little bottle of something or other in here that she rubs on her forehead—and that eases the pain."

"Then why on earth didn't she rub it on early this morning?" I inquired wonderingly.

"That's what I asked her," he answered with a slight laugh, "but she says that the stuff burns the skin and leaves a red mark; and she didn't want to be disfigured for the ball—I told her that she would have looked just the same to me—red mark or no red mark."

He was smiling good-naturedly as he worked with the lock of the bag, which after a moment or two came open with a lamb-like docility. He was walking across the room to deposit it upon the table when Sophie came in and saw him with the bag opened in his hand. She gave a little startled exclamation and we both wheeled and faced her.

"That's the wrong bag," she said, speaking with such nervous haste and her face wearing such a white, scared look that we both instinctively glanced into the open case Mr. Maxwell held in his hands.

"Don't! There's something in there that I don't want you to see!"

Poor girl, if it had been a dynamite bomb or a counterfeiter's kit of tools, she could scarcely have looked more frightened, for Mr. Maxwell and I had already seen the contents. His face suddenly went white, too, as he quickly strode across the room and laid the bag upon the table.

"*This* is likely the thing you didn't want us to see," he exclaimed, reaching in and holding up to the light a glittering little object. It was a hypodermic syringe!

When she saw the silvery-looking instrument actually in his hand and observed the stern, harsh look in his eyes she gave a wild, hysterical laugh and walked quickly across to him. She clutched the shining thing from his hand and held it up before me.

"*Now* you both know the 'disgraceful secret' which Aunt Ida has made me keep so securely locked away from you," she cried, holding the instrument in her hand and pulling the piston backward and forward with a deftness born of long familiarity. "She made me promise to keep it a secret, for she said that if her 'society' friends knew of it I should be consid-

ered beyond the pale. Heavens knows that I am sorry for it and ashamed of it, but there was a mighty—temptation.”

She sat down in the nearest chair and began to cry, her face buried in her folded arms, and her shoulders heaving convulsively. I went over quickly and laid my hand upon her head.

“Don’t cry, Sophie!” I begged, “it will make your head worse; and—*this* doesn’t make the slightest difference in our feeling for you. We are not ‘society,’ are we, Mr. Maxwell?”

I glanced appealingly toward him, but he did not see me. His eyes were fixed upon Sophie’s bowed head with a pitying, yet *horrified* stare, then the look of bewilderment which he wore at the first sight of her came over his face, painfully intensified this time.

“My God!” he finally broke out, and I knew that he did not know he was speaking aloud. “I have seen you before to-night with that thing in your hand! I can even feel its sharp little sting in *my* arm—but where—*where*—I can’t remember.”

At his queer words Sophie looked quickly up, but he had already turned his back to us two and was leaving the room. We heard him linger a moment in

the hall as if he might be looking for his hat; then the big front door closed behind him.

"He still doesn't remember!" she said slowly, looking at me in surprise. "I thought he would. I don't imagine that he has had much experience with trained nurses, so I fancied it would all come back to him when he found that I was one."

"You took care of him when his head was hurt last year?"

"Yes. I nursed him from the night he was brought into the hospital until he was almost out of danger—it was a long, tedious case, and we thought for a while that we were not going to save him."

"And you really were telling some child about the little pigs going to market one night when he heard you?" I asked, thinking how much stranger than fiction this case was.

"Yes. That was after he was beginning to be better, but I was still his 'special.' The baby's cot had been moved out into the corridor just beyond his door—it was so hot—and I used to slip out there occasionally and get the little fellow to sleep. But I came down with malarial fever myself before Mr. Maxwell was entirely well. That's the reason his memory of me is so hazy."

"Then why didn't you tell him plainly—when you first met him here and saw that he remembered you?" I asked as she got up and opened the bag wider to try to find the bottle of medicine she wanted, for her hand went to her head in a manner which told me that all this excitement had in nowise lessened the pain.

"That's what I am so sorry for and ashamed of," she answered simply, as she lifted some of the contents of the bag out and placed them upon the table. "I shouldn't have stayed here an *hour* after Aunt Ida told me I must sail under false covers, but—I said a while ago, in my excitement, that there was a mighty temptation! I didn't intend to say it, but—it is true."

"And the temptation was—"

We heard the front door open then and close again softly. Mr. Maxwell had finished his walk out in the cool night air. I hoped that he would come on back into the library as he heard our voices, but he passed the door and in another moment we heard his footsteps on the stairs.

"They told me that *he* was coming," Sophie said.

Four days have passed since the night of the

Thanksgiving ball ; and at a house-party where four days drag there is a greater sense of calamity than would be caused by a dreary four weeks at some other time. For there is always the tormenting thought of how much hay one might have been piling up if the sun would only shine.

Here are the three of us—Evelyn, Sophie and I—all at the age of Eve ; and all enduring such a period of gloom that I feel sure if the original Eve had been half as badly bored she would never have waited for a pretty snake to come along and amuse her—she would have started up a flirtation with a *grub-worm*!

Richard is still away and I have not even had a line from him. Neither has any one else on the place, of course, but his name appeared in the society columns of the *Times* the day after Thanksgiving. He had attended the football game that afternoon with Major Blake's party, the paper stated—and alas ! I was in no position to dispute the statement.

Now if there is *one* thing a girl hates worse than having her rat show in the presence of her beloved it is to have that beloved's name appear in a society column when her own is not in the same line !

"Why the Blakes?" I kept wondering uneasily, as I read over the hateful paragraph again and again; and I tried to fight down the fierce feeling of jealousy which took possession of me. "Why couldn't he have gone to the foot-ball game with some one else—or why couldn't he have come home?"

I found upon this occasion that jealousy is a passion which makes me physically ill, and I thought quickly of how tormented Richard must be by his jealous disposition. I wondered if he had ever felt the quick desire to strangle Alfred Morgan that I now caught myself feeling to annihilate the entire Blake faction. They had no right to make Richard leave home upon such an occasion as this; or they should have finished their hateful business and sent him on back home for Thanksgiving. They certainly had no right to take him off with them to a foot-ball game for all the world to see—and have his name with theirs in the paper next morning.

"Major Blake had with him in his car, besides Mrs. Blake, Miss Berenice Blake, who returned last week from Denver, and Mr. Richard Chalmers."

I knew the horrid words by heart, yet I read them over and over. And even this was not the worst.

On the front page of the *Times* was a cartoon representing Major Blake seated beside a little creek, angling persistently for a fish in midstream—a fish with Richard's handsome head and "Chalmers" printed in big letters across the side. The bait was a bag of gold and a handful of glory; and beneath it was written "Little fishie in the brook, can daddy catch him with a hook?"

Such a cartoon in Rufe's paper struck me as being pregnant with meaning. What did it portend? Why did Richard leave home at this time to spend Thanksgiving with old man Blake if it did not mean that he was entangled with him? How deeply entangled—and for what? Major Blake had some time ago given the anti-liquor forces to understand that they had not money enough for their campaign to make a union with them interesting to him. But the Appleton followers had been equally unsuccessful in trying to gain his support. *Could* it be that he and Richard intended forming a separate faction where his own personal popularity should cut a tremendous figure in gaining for him what he wanted, and he could have the backing of Richard's friends among the temperance forces? But where would Richard come in then? Why should old man

Blake give all the biggest portion of the plum to Richard, when he had never been governor himself?

I thought over the matter and *thought*—until I grew dizzy with the problem, yet I never found anything that could serve even as a half-way solution. But enough of my own grievances.

As I have said, Sophie and Evelyn are both miserable, too, though in entirely different ways. Evelyn is half ill, with a constantly threatening pain in her right side—a trouble which she has had for several years—and Sophie, poor girl, has stayed in her room most of the time because she is so disappointed in the way Mr. Maxwell has acted since he learned that she is a working-woman. Horrid cad! He has watched Sophie every minute she has been in his presence since that night, looking as if he were a detective and suspected her of carrying concealed weapons about her. Yet all the time there is a look of dumb misery in his eyes—sorrow and *incredulity*.

He has several times tried to get me off alone where he could talk to me of the occurrence Thanksgiving night, but I have been careful to avoid him, for I am as much disappointed in him as Sophie is. Each of them has tried to leave, but Mrs. Chalmers has insisted upon their not doing so. She is so upset

over Evelyn that she needs Sophie's skilled advice in nursing, although no open acknowledgment of the matter has been made. And she has insisted that Mr. Maxwell remain at least until Richard returns.

Meanwhile she has tried to get a message through to Richard in the city, but she has been so far unable to find him. Altogether it is rather a miserable household.

Another day; and it started so well and ended so queerly that I am not going to try to sleep for hours yet—until I have written the whole thing out so I can read it over and see whether or not it really happened, for I find it so hard to believe.

To begin at the beginning, Richard called up from the city this morning and explained to his mother that he had been on a business trip down in the country—far away from a telephone station, he said, and so he had not been able to communicate with her. He asked her to call me to the telephone and we had as satisfying a little talk as people in our position ever have over wires. He would be down home on the first train in the morning, he told me, and he insisted that I tell him something he might have the pleasure of bringing me.

"Oh, I'll excuse the olive branch," I replied in answer to this question, "for I'll be so glad to see you."

Glad to see him? Ah yes, so glad! And in the joy of the thought I forgot all about being jealous of the Blakes. With this restoration of happiness the day naturally passed more quickly to me, and I found myself wondering why Evelyn didn't get over that hurting in her side, and why Mrs. Chalmers still looked so anxious and why Sophie and Mr. Maxwell continued to eye each other so reproachfully when the one thought the other was not looking. Richard was coming home in the morning! Surely all would be well then!

Dinner was a dismal affair, for Evelyn was not any better—was not so well, Mrs. Chalmers said, with a look of great anxiety, although the doctor had not said positively what the trouble was. As soon as we had left the table Sophie followed Mrs. Chalmers to Evelyn's room, thus leaving Mr. Maxwell to a tête-à-tête evening with me.

There was a brilliant fire in the library and we both were attracted toward its cheer as we crossed the hall. He lit a cigarette and sat staring moodily at the little clouds of smoke which he puffed into

the air. Clearly he was not going to thrust conversation upon me. To make sure that he should have no encouragement to do so I began looking around vaguely for something to read. There was a pile of fresh papers which had come by the night's train lying folded on the table, but I have had little appetite for newspapers since the day of the fishy cartoon. I should not read any more of the horrid tales about him, but he should tell me all that there was to tell and I would believe him. But not a question did I expect to ask. His confidence should be entirely voluntary or not given at all.

No newspapers for me then this night; and I glanced around the room for something else. Something forbidding-looking and very deep I decided on as being best to keep Mr. Maxwell's conversational powers in abeyance. I went to one of the book-shelves which lined the walls. Running my hand along a line of Huxley's works I came to *Science and the Christian Tradition* and promptly decided that this was the very volume I needed to impress Mr. Maxwell that I was reading something very profound and needed all my wits about me.

Returning to my chair by the fire I sat down and opened my book, but I was in nowise disap-

pointed by finding that the leaves had never been cut. There was a heavy pearl-and-silver paper-cutter lying on the table near by, but I did not take the trouble to reach for it. What did I care for a lot of prehistoric teeth and toe-nails dug up and brought forward to prove that before "Adam delved and Eve span" the baboon was a gentleman?

Mr. Maxwell continued to stare into the fire, and I do not believe he ever glanced at the impressive three-quarters morocco binding I was holding up so persistently for him to see. After half-an-hour had been thus profitlessly spent I grew tired and decided that I would go to my room and go to bed. Morning would come the more quickly this way.

As I started to cross the room to replace the book in its niche I heard Mrs. Chalmers going up the steps again—it seemed to me fully fifty times that evening she had made pilgrimages up and down those stairs on her way to and from the invalid's room.

"Evelyn must be worse," I said aloud before I remembered that I was trying *not* to start conversation.

"Possibly so," he answered politely.

"I believe I'll go now and see if I can do anything to help Mrs. Chalmers; she must be worn out."

I put the Huxley back where he belonged and had turned again to wish Mr. Maxwell good night, when I found that he had at last unfastened his eyes from the bright fire and was looking toward me appealingly.

"Miss Fielding," he began with an unwonted timidity.

I had already opened the door to leave the room, but I came back a few steps, leaving the door wide open; and as I did so I heard, for the fifty-first time, the sound of Mrs. Chalmers' footfalls upon the stairs. She was coming down this time.

"Yes?" I said coldly in the direction of Mr. Maxwell.

"Miss Fielding, I am going away in the morning," he said rather awkwardly, as he pushed up a chair for me again, but I did not sit down. I leaned over a little and rested my elbows against its high leather back. He stood upon the hearth-rug, and even the shaded lights of the room brought out the troubled lines on his face. "I am going away on the same train that brings Chalmers home," he repeated.

"Yes."

"And I was anxious to talk with you a little before I go," he went on with considerable hesitation.

My attitude was far from being encouraging. "You seem to be on friendly terms with her still—with Sophie, I mean."

"I *am* on friendly terms," I said rather pointedly. "I am fortunately not the kind of person who indulges in *seeming* friendship."

"Oh, I say, Miss Fielding, don't rub it in on a fellow! Don't you see that I have been half crazy ever since I found it out? Surely you don't think that the matter hasn't made me feel worse cut up than anything that ever happened to me before! A man doesn't get over a shock like *that*!"

"Shock?"

"Certainly shock," he repeated earnestly. "If she had told me she is a horse-thief I couldn't have felt worse. Of course a man could keep up a sort of pitying friendliness after such an acknowledgment as that, but—I had intended asking her that night to marry me."

He looked at me as if he might be beseeching me to speak a word of comfort to him, but I stood there and said nothing.

"Miss Fielding, surely you understand that I couldn't marry a woman who, by her own acknowledgment, is a—a dlope-fiend."

"Dope-fiend!" I gave a little shriek.

He looked at me a moment as if he thought I had lost my mind, then we were both startled by the abrupt entrance of Mrs. Chalmers at the door which I had a few minutes before left open. She had evidently heard my horrified exclamation and come in to investigate. She looked from one to the other of us inquiringly, and there was no use trying to hide the situation from her.

"Miss Fielding and I were talking about Sophie, Mrs. Chalmers," Mr. Maxwell explained after a moment of painful silence. "She acknowledged to us, Miss Fielding and me, the other night the—the truth about this unhappy condition."

"The truth?" Mrs. Chalmers' tone was questioning, although I knew that she must have heard my startled cry as I repeated the hideous word he had used a moment before.

"It was the night that we stayed away from the ball—we three—and we found the evidence in her bag. She acknowledged that it was true. I had expected to ask her to marry me that night—but she is a drug-fiend."

Mrs. Chalmers started, but she did not speak. She made no effort to correct him.

"So of course I am leaving in the morning. I should have gone long ago, but—"

He looked at Richard's mother, who stood in the center of the room, directly beneath the chandelier. The light shone down on her soft white hair and changed it into a veritable crown of glory. She moved her crown slightly as she nodded an assent to his suggestion of leaving in the morning, but she did not lift a finger to detain him, nor to set him right in regard to Sophie. Could it be that her desire to get Evelyn married off to him was going to carry her to such lengths as this? It seemed so; and I caught myself wondering quickly if in so doing she might be carrying out a command of Richard's. Likely he was very positive in bidding her keep Sophie's secret, or in impressing it upon her that Evelyn ought to be suitably married. In either case she would be mortally afraid to speak—she would *not* speak. Then quickly upon the heels of this came the knowledge that if she did not speak it was my place to do so, for I knew the truth as well as she did—but it might make Richard angry! It would be sure to if he had given commands that the secret should be kept! I might even lose him—

"That train leaves at six-thirty, I believe?"

Again he looked at Mrs. Chalmers and she again nodded her head. But she did not speak.

"Then I shall not have an opportunity of seeing you in the morning," and he walked over and shook hands with his hostess, making his adieus in a wretchedly forced way.

She shook hands with him and allowed him to pass on to me. I gave him my hand in a mechanical fashion, and my eyes were fixed upon Mrs. Chalmers' face. She was evidently frightened at the thought of the thing she was doing; but she was just as evidently going to see it through.

"Good-by, Miss Fielding," Mr. Maxwell said simply, then turned toward the door.

I was still looking at her as I heard the sound of his hand upon the door-knob, but as I realized in that instant that he was really *going* and that neither of us had lifted a finger to set him right, a sudden power over which it seemed that I had no control came and caught me, almost physically forcing me out of my place. I ran across the room.

"Mr. Maxwell!" I called.

He came back a few steps and stood facing us.

"You were leaving—that is, we were about to let you leave—under a false impression," I stammered

breathlessly, all the time a sense of my doing something very much out of place strong upon me.

"False impression?" His eyes were glittering feverishly.

"Yes. It is true that we found the—the thing you mentioned in Sophie's bag that night, but she is no —dope-fiend."

He stood still as if he were petrified.

"Physicians carry those things in instrument cases," I went on, feeling that my explanation sounded very tame and inadequate. "Physicians carry them and so do *nurses*."

He looked at me a moment in utter bewilderment, then, slowly, comprehension dawned in his eyes. Even the understanding was going to be bitter to him, for there would be the humiliating confession that he would have to make to her that he had misjudged her.

As I said the word "nurses" Mrs. Chalmers moved a step forward and held up a warning hand.

"Ann," she exclaimed in a frightened whisper, "Richard said that this affair was *not* to be mentioned."

"A professional nurse!" Mr. Maxwell cried, his face lighting up as a hundred hazy memories came

flooding over him. "In El Paso—my God! *Of course!*"

He came up to me and caught my arm.

"This is what you mean?" he asked.

Mrs. Chalmers' eyes were fixed on me in a kind of fascinated wonder. How *could* any one go against Richard's expressed wish? But my own eyes were meeting hers steadily as I turned to answer Mr. Maxwell's pleading question.

"Yes, that is what I mean. Sophie belongs to the great army of the Red Cross!"

CHAPTER XV

THE DOUGLAS IN HIS HALL

AS is frequently the case when I have gone to bed late and in a perturbed state of mind, I awake early, with a heavy feeling between my eyes and a marked distaste to getting up. It was so this morning, except I had an indistinct impression that, instead of waking normally, I had been awakened by some unusual noise.

I turned over in bed and looked around the room for a few minutes before I began to think of the effort of getting up. I had by no means forgotten that Richard was coming—might already be here, as the spasmodic bursts of sunshine indicated that it was at least seven o'clock—but he would not expect me to do anything so unusual as to dress this early and meet him down-stairs for a few minutes' stolen happiness before we should meet and shake hands formally at the breakfast table. The bliss of such a secret little reunion might, doubtless would, ap-

peal to most lovers, but not to Cœur de Lion. He would see in it only the impropriety of a young woman meeting a man in a deserted library in the early hours of the morning. Richard has this way of throwing—well, not exactly cold water, but *iced lemonade*, over the exuberance of my youthful feelings! I wish this were not so, but—

I looked around the beautiful, befrilled bedroom, with its handsome furniture of Circassian walnut and its dainty blue silk hangings—and I thought, with a quick little pang of longing, of my severely plain sleeping apartment at home. This Spartan bareness is in imitation of Alfred's cell-like bedroom, which Ann Lisbeth had once shown me, and which had attracted me by the air of wholesomeness the immaculate cleanliness gave it. Alfred and I have often planned a house so plain and sanitary that we could turn the hose all through it. House-keeping would be a delightfully simple affair with him, for he and I agree so perfectly in our dislike of complicated things. Dear me! I wonder what kind of house Richard and I will keep? It will be—expensive, but will it be harmonious?

The events of last night came crowding before me and I remembered with a most disagreeable little

chill that Mrs. Chalmers' eye had held a look of terror as she thought of Richard's commands being disobeyed. Was Richard a monster then? Did he *eat* people when they dared to go contrary to his wishes? I also recalled the day he and I had had our first actual quarrel—about the volume of Byron which Alfred had given me. His eyes grow very cold and glittering when he is angry, and—yes, I can understand that a certain class of women might be very much afraid of him. Especially if they had him to live with! And I wondered if, at last, after months of struggling, I, too, might not find it more restful and peaceable to become a groveling sort of hypocrite to my lord and master?

“Never, never!” I cried aloud, jumping out of bed as I heard again the same sounds which had awakened me—hurrying footsteps down-stairs through the halls, and the sound of many doors being hastily opened and closed. “I’ll give him up if I find him as they say he is.”

Just then I recognized the heavy, dignified slam of the massive front door, a kind of muffled protest against the impertinence of using haste with such an august portion of that house; then, a moment after, there was the sound of an automobile starting.

"Evelyn must be much worse," I thought uneasily, as I hurried through with my bath and slipped into my clothes. If this were so I knew that I should not have to meet Mrs. Chalmers at the breakfast table, and I should be relieved of the ordeal of coming in contact with her bland smile. I instinctively felt that she would meet us all exactly as if nothing had happened the night before. She is entirely too well-bred to bear malice.

Now, for my part, I have a nervous distaste to whited sepulchers, aside from any question of morality, and I always have a sense of being brought face to face with the rottenness and dead men's bones whenever I am forced to *smooth* over a situation which has not been thoroughly explained and threshed out. When I have a grievance against any one, my first desire is to "have it out" with the offender, and I always want any one whom I have offended to offer me the same privilege of setting myself straight.

But Mrs. Chalmers would, I know, sit for ever at the mouth of such whited sepulcher with a bottle of vera-violet held to her nose before she would face anybody in helping to rid the place of its pestilence.

These thoughts were running through my mind as

I was dressing, and I will say that I had the grace to feel ashamed of them as I ran down the steps and met her in the hall, her face looking old and drawn with anxiety, her hair in disarray, and her figure enveloped in a fantastic kimono.

"Evelyn is very much worse," she said in a trembling voice as I came up with her and inquired after the patient. "It is an acute attack of appendicitis and Doctor Cooley has just telephoned to the city for Doctor Gordon to come out on the first train. He says—she can't—*live* without an operation; and, even so, he is very much afraid that it—the appendix—has ruptured."

She broke down here and sobbed miserably, burying her face in her hands and wiping away the tears upon one long silken sleeve of her flowered kimono.

"Evelyn is all I have in this world," she moaned, and I suddenly felt infinitely sorry for her—and forgiving. "She is all I have to comfort me in my miserable life, and now Richard has come home and blames this trouble on me."

"Blames you?" I questioned, looking down upon her disordered hair in amazement at the thought.

"He says that I ought to have known better than to let her dance so much the other night," she ex-

plained, lifting a tear-stained face to me for a moment, as if to acknowledge the sympathy in my voice. Clearly she was not accustomed to sympathy.

"Dance!" I said again in surprise. "Why, people have appendicitis who have never seen inside a ball-room! That is a most absurd idea."

"Not nearly so absurd as some things he hatches up against us two," she broke out, her anger toward Richard making her forget, for a moment, her anxiety for Evelyn. "Oh, Ann, he leads us *such* a life! He is exactly like his father—and he was a *despot*!"

We were interrupted by the quick footsteps of Sophie, as she came hurrying through the hall. She had an ice-cap in her hand, and there was a thermometer-case thrust through her belt. There was no trained nurse in Charlotteville, so she had quietly explained to Doctor Cooley her qualifications to act in that capacity. Mrs. Chalmers whispered this to me, as Sophie passed by; also that Mr. Maxwell had left on the same train that brought Richard, but not before he and Sophie had spent a long hour together in the quiet library.

"She was up nearly all night," Mrs. Chalmers said, "so they came face to face here in the hall at daybreak. She is a good girl, and he will make her

happy. I am glad they have come to an understanding."

"But I thought—" I began, then stopped, not knowing how to express my idea about her plans for Mr. Maxwell and Evelyn; but she read my mind.

"You thought I wanted to catch him for Evelyn?" she asked without embarrassment. "Well, I did, but I shouldn't have gone to such lengths, except for the sake of keeping Richard in a good humor."

"Then he'll be in a very bad humor with me when he hears that I was the one who told about Sophie," I suggested, but she cut me short.

"Oh, he's in such a fiendish humor about something that happened to him on this trip of his that he will forget all about these things here at home."

"Is there some sort of political trouble?" I asked anxiously, but she shook her head.

"Richard never mentions his business affairs to us," she said, as she smoothed down her kimono and followed Sophie up the stairs.

Half an hour later Richard met me at the door of the breakfast-room, looking very tired and morose. We sat down and ate breakfast in unchaperoned gloom. He asked me a few perfunctory questions about the happenings here since he left, but he vol-

unteered no information as to what kind of business it was which had taken him away, nor where he had been.

After breakfast we established ourselves in the library, he with a batch of newspapers which he had brought with him from the city and I had a new magazine, but he seemed to care little for reading, and he sat and smoked in moody silence for a while. The day was warm, but the sunshine of the early morning grew fainter, and by noon there were signs of a thunder-shower, the clouds seeming to gather from all directions; and the air became oppressively heavy.

Richard finally threw away the end of his cigar, yawned a time or two in an abstracted sort of fashion, then got up and walked over to the window. He pulled aside the curtains and looked out at the threatening sky.

"Get your hat and let's go out for a little fresh air before it rains," he suggested as he came back and threw himself into his chair again, stretching out his long legs to the fire.

I got up obediently and started toward the door, but he reached out, caught my hand and stopped me.

"Isn't it a devilish old day?" he said lazily, as he

drew me down toward him. "You haven't kissed me once since I came home. Don't you love me any more?"

"Love you? Of course I love you!" I answered, kissing him on the forehead and smoothing back his fair hair. I had entirely forgotten the traitorous thoughts of the early morning. "But you have been in *such* a mood! Who wants to kiss something that looks about as lover-like as Rameses II?"

He smiled a little and took my face between his hands.

"I *am* a savage," he admitted, though not at all bearing the appearance of one at that moment; "but I've had a lot to try me lately—and then I was so disgusted when I came home and found that mother had let Evelyn dance herself into another of these attacks."

"Oh, Richard! Surely you don't really think it was the dance that brought it on? It might have been the dinner—but I shouldn't even suggest that to your mother. She is miserable enough already. You ought to try to comfort her."

"That's very charitable of you," he said, a sarcastic little flicker around the corners of his mouth, "but, all the same, I find that I can manage my wom-

enkind better to use a little frankness with them occasionally."

I drew back from him somewhat.

"Frankness?" I cried in genuine surprise at his cold sarcasm. "Even if frankness were the right name for—this, do you consider that now is the time for it? When she is so wretched?"

He turned from me and threw down the paper he had picked up a moment before as I stood talking to him.

"Let's don't quarrel," he said finally, in a low tone; and, impulsively reaching out both hands to me, he added: "And, Ann, for God's sake, don't ever act as if you were afraid of me!"

"Afraid of you!"

He smiled. I think he has the most adorable smile of any man on earth.

"Go and get your hat," he said.

As I came down-stairs again with my hat on I found Sophie standing at the front door talking with Richard. She was dressed entirely in the garb of a nurse by this time, and I looked admiringly at the becoming white uniform, but Richard made no reference to the change nor anything that it entailed.

"Sophie thinks that we would better not go very

far," he said to me as he stepped outside into the vestibule and looked up again at the clouds. "She says Evelyn is not resting so well—and mother, of course, has entirely lost her grip."

"Do you think that there is any new danger in Evelyn's case?" I asked anxiously.

"Well, we are eager for the surgeon to get here as quickly as possible," she answered.

"He'll be here on the noon train, and, of course, he can operate immediately. And it hasn't been nearly twenty-four hours since the onset of the acute attack. The mortality is less than one per cent. if taken within—"

I had been looking into Sophie's eyes as I spoke and had not observed that Richard was listening intently to what I was saying, but as I made use of this last bit of medical jargon a contemptuous little half-laugh broke from him and I looked up quickly. He was smiling sardonically.

"Of course your friend, Doctor Morgan, is your authority," he said, his brows elevated and a disagreeable expression around his mouth.

"He is—and I couldn't ask a better," I flashed back at him.

We stood thus a moment, our eyes meeting in

fiery challenge, and in that brief moment I realized that such a scene repeated a few times would cause us to hate each other. I felt suddenly, as if the earth were receding from me and leaving me in a very uncertain stratum of air. I was violently angry with Richard—and he was infuriated.

“It’s a pity the public continues to display such a lamentable ignorance in regard to this wonderful Hippocrates of yours,” he sneered, though in an even voice.

“That ignorance is growing less every day,” I responded easily, so easily, in fact, that I am sure Sophie never suspected that we were both at white heat.

But she was embarrassed at the bad taste we were both exhibiting, so she made some excuse and quickly left us. We walked slowly down toward the gate, not that there was any joy left in the prospect of a quiet walk together, but because there seemed nothing better to do right then. Out through the gate and quite a distance up the street we passed before either of us spoke, and I noticed once that his right hand, which clasped his slender silk umbrella, was trembling.

“Ann,” he said finally, speaking in a remarkably

low, gentle voice, "why does it seem to give you such pleasure to torture me that way?"

"Torture you?" I answered. "Oh, Richard! Why should you torture yourself into a passion if I but mention anything even remotely connected with the medical profession?"

"Medical profession!" His voice was still very quiet. "You would imply then that I am—that I am jealous of this yearling doctor?"

There was infinite contempt in the word "yearling."

"I don't *imply*!" I responded warmly. "I have good, clear English for what I wish to say."

"You certainly have for all that you wish to say about this paragon of yours."

"He *is* a paragon; but he isn't mine."

"No? I wonder why? You certainly might have won him!"

Was this a lovers' quarrel? I had always heard them spoken of as being frivolous, make-believe disagreements, whose sting was light as thistle-down and whose shadows were quick to disappear at the dawn of a beloved smile. But if this were true, then my altercation with Richard was a much more serious affair, for I found my patience strained to the

breaking point when I finally burst out: "Richard, hush! This is disgraceful! I will not quarrel with you any longer. You make me wish that I had never seen your face!"

My vehemence seemed to startle him out of his own wrath, or, at all events, it acted as a signal to him that he was to go no further, for he began to retract; not humbly, not penitently, as if he had found himself in the wrong, but with a sudden sparkling brilliance, his eyes and his smile dazzling my senses as they did the sunny afternoon we spent together, sitting on the orchard fence.

"Well, I'm glad I have seen your face," he said fondly, as he looked down upon me with that same air of possession, "for you are the prettiest little spitfire I ever saw."

He suggested that we walk up to the river side, not a great distance away, but it is as secluded a spot as if it were miles away from human habitation. There are thickets of undergrowth just beyond a skirt of woods, and a stone wall where we might sit down for a quiet little talk.

We made for this spot in silence, and, as he placed a strong, lithe hand on either side of my waist to lift me bodily up on the wall he said, with that same

directness of manner which I found characterized his speech: "Ann, I beg your pardon—ten thousand times, sweetheart! Will you forgive me—and—and kiss me?"

His lips were already upon mine, and I knew then that there was nothing in this life so beautiful and sweet and intoxicating as their touch. I gave myself up to the exquisite madness with an abandon which shuts out all knowledge that Richard and I are not comrades, not even friends—that we have no ideals in common, no similar tastes! What does all this matter when he has his arms about me and I am so close to him that I can hear the quick thump, thump of his heart-beats, and I know how they quicken for me! Nothing matters! I love him!

"That's my own little girl," he said radiantly, as he lifted his face from mine and saw my entire surrender. "This is the first moment to-day that I have felt as if you really love me."

He dusted off a space on the wall then sprang lightly up to a seat by my side.

"I've been waiting for you to brighten up a bit and look like yourself," he continued after a few minutes of happy silence. "I have something to show you."

"Something to show me?" I looked at him wonderingly.

"Something I brought you from—from the city."

"But I told you not to bring me anything."

"I know. But I had already bought it then, and I couldn't take it back to the jeweler and tell him that my lady had turned it down, could I?"

He drew a little case from his pocket, a long, slender one this time, and as I found my eyes fixed with an eager fascination upon his hands as they worked for a moment with the catch, I seemed to see stretching before me a long vista of years, each one punctuated with quarrels like the one we had just endured, and the rough places left by these ruptures filled in and smoothed over by myriads of these small, dainty jewel-boxes. But Richard's deft fingers had opened the case, and he passed it over to me. I gave a little gasp of astonished delight as I saw lying upon its bed of velvet a string of pearls—white, softly-glistening, beautiful things.

"Let's see how they look on you," he suggested, unfastening the dull gold clasp and slipping the lovely chain around my neck. He fastened them securely, then smiled approval as he leaned back and viewed the effect.

"I've wanted you to have something like this ever since I've known you," he said with the air of a connoisseur as he still held back and looked at the pearls lying close around the neck of my collarless blouse. "So when I happened to see these the other day in—the city, I decided that they were exactly what I wanted for my little girl."

I was opening and shutting the box as he talked, and when he mentioned seeing them in the city I idly glanced at the name on the lining, and saw that the case bore the name of a well-known firm in St. Louis.

"Why, Richard," I cried, "did you go all the way to St. Louis to find them?"

I laughed, but there were two tiny lines between his eyes.

"Don't say anything about it to mother, but the truth is I did have to go to St. Louis while I was away from home this time."

"Your mother thinks you were down in some little country town—away from a telephone!"

"Well, it was a—business trip. She wouldn't be interested, and I never have believed in a man boring his family with his business affairs."

"I shouldn't be bored, Richard," I began, hoping

so fervently that he was going to confide in me that half the joy I should have been feeling over my beautiful new possession was turned into pain when I saw that he was not.

He changed the subject quietly and we discussed various minor matters, until I remembered, with a start, that it was time for us to be going home. It must be long past noon. I mentioned this to Richard and he jumped down immediately.

"I haven't heard the train whistle, have you?"

"No, but we haven't been listening for it. Look at your watch."

He did so, and we were both surprised and not a little ashamed when we saw that it was half-past one.

"We'll have to hurry," he said briefly, and we walked home faster, I dare say, than ever lovers walked away from that delightful spot before.

When we reached the house we found that the doctor from the city had indeed arrived; the preparations for the operation being well under way. There was not to be an hour's delay, Sophie told us, as she paused on her way up the steps. Her hands were full of glistening instruments, and a negro servant followed with kettles of boiled water.

"What does Gordon think of her condition?" Richard asked, as he eyed Sophie's burden with a little shrinking.

"Doctor Gordon couldn't come," she answered abstractedly as she looked around and gave the servant some directions about keeping a bountiful supply of water that had been boiled, "there was a wreck on the road that he is surgeon for—it didn't amount to much, but still he had to be there, so he telephoned Doctor Cooley that this young colleague of his whom he sent to do the operation is thoroughly competent—it seems that they operate together a great deal. I didn't catch the young doctor's name when he was introduced—and I've been too busy since to ask."

"Doctor Morgan," I said, feeling sure that Doctor Gordon would send no one but Alfred on a case like this.

"Doctor Morgan—the *devil* it is!" Richard's voice burst out so suddenly and so fiercely that I turned and looked at him in amazement. Then, for the first time, I realized how easy it might be to be afraid of him. Fierce and sudden as the words were, they were spoken in his deep, even voice, and not a muscle of his face showed the intense fury which I felt

that he was laboring under. It was a cold, cruel anger, and it showed only in his eyes. They were glittering like two sharp-pointed steel blades. "Doctor Morgan here—and you knew all the time that he was coming!"

He looked at me so accusingly that Sophie sensed the point of the situation at once, although she had never heard Alfred's name mentioned before; and she broke in with a light laugh.

"Why, he didn't know himself that he was coming until ten minutes before train time. It was too late even to find a nurse to bring with him, so I am going to help in the operation."

Her words had the effect of quieting, in a measure, this insane suspicion of Richard's; and he and I followed her up the broad staircase. She led the way into the room which had been hastily divested of its rich furnishings and transformed into a semblance of an operating-room; and we two followed automatically. Sophie passed in and began busying herself about the preparations, but just inside the doorway we stopped.

Standing in the middle of the floor, near the end of a long table upon which had been placed several bowls of water, some clear, others light blue, his

top shirt off and his arms up to his elbows thickly coated over with a soft lather, was Alfred. Another young fellow, whom I afterward learned was a local physician, stood near the table; and he too was busily "scrubbing up." As we came into the room Alfred bade Sophie hurry up with her own preparations.

"Would you object to hearing a word from me before your manipulations go further?" Richard's voice broke in, after the briefest and most perfunctory of greetings, which fortunately were divested of any hypocritical handshaking on account of Alfred's green soapiness. "I understand that our family physician, Doctor Cooley, telephoned to the city for Doctor *Gordon* to come down here and operate upon my sister."

"Doctor Gordon received the message, but was detained by a small wreck on the Eastern," Alfred said quietly, rinsing the soap-suds from his hands and motioning Sophie to drop another bichloride tablet into the next bowl of water. "He sent me to do the work."

"So I have been informed," Richard said, his eyes looking far colder and more cutting than the steel instruments which Sophie was now rattling

about in a big pan, "but—as it happens—I don't want you to do the work."

The insult was so barefaced and so ugly that Sophie suddenly turned scarlet and the young doctor bending over the bowl of water busied himself unnecessarily with a bottle of green soap. Richard himself began nervously tampering with his watch-fob, while I afterward recalled that my fingers were playing convulsively with the pearls which were still around my neck. It was an *electrical* moment and we all showed signs of weakening before the current—all except Alfred.

He stood in the same spot at the end of the table, directing straight at Richard his level, steady glance, and looking the personification of simple dignity—in an undershirt.

"That might put a different aspect upon the matter," he said slowly after a moment's deliberation. Not a muscle of his face changed, and no one less well acquainted with him than I am could have detected the hardness in his voice.

"*Might* put a different aspect?" Richard looked incredulous.

"Yes, it might—if the patient were a minor, and you her sole guardian."

"Ah! Then you mean to ignore my rights?"

"I do—if you wish to put it that way. Your sister's condition is critical; and there is no one else to operate."

"Then there is no appeal to be made to your pride?" I do not know what Richard meant, nor do I believe that he knew himself, for he surely would not have run the risk of trying to get another surgeon when it had been made so clear to him that the delay would be fatal. Alfred seemed to realize that there was no more occasion for argument than if he had been talking to an unreasonable child—or a dangerous lunatic.

"No; my pride lies dormant in a case like this," he answered simply. "I acknowledge only Duty."

Then, at Alfred's words, it seemed that the magic change which I have before noticed comes over Richard when he sees that he has gone far enough, began to make itself felt. It appeared that he was not going to have the courage to turn about and apologize, as he had done with me earlier in the day; but he began to do what he considered all that was ever necessary from *him* to ordinary mortals. He began to back, sullenly.

"Of course, if it is only an ordinary case of ap-

pendicitis *you* might do," he admitted grudgingly, "but—suppose there are complications?"

I give Richard credit for not intending this worst insult of all. He was so entirely absorbed in gaining his own end, and that end was proving to Alfred that he was incompetent to operate, that he failed to consider the words he used. To him this was only a simple argument in favor of his theory. Alfred met the thrust as he had met the minor ones.

"If there are complications, I shall grapple with them," he answered quietly. "That's what I studied surgery for."

Sophie came across the room then and told us in a low voice that they were about ready. Would we please wait outside? Without another word Richard took me by the arm and we walked out together. He held my arm tightly as we made our way cautiously down the steps; cautiously because it had suddenly grown very dark and there were threatening rumbles in the distance, following vivid flashes of lightning. The fumes of the anesthetic were filling the house, while outside the big drops of rain were beginning to pelt down, making little comet-shaped streaks of wetness against the window-panes.

We heard the shuffling steps as they moved Evelyn into the room and placed her upon the table; then we heard Alfred call from the head of the steps, his voice calm and unruffled as it would be in the case of any gentleman making a request of another.

"Mr. Chalmers, will you call the power-house and have them turn on the lights?"

Hours after, when it was all safely over and Sophie earnestly supplemented the local doctor's praise of Alfred's skill and technique, Richard sought me out as I stood alone in the dining-room locking up the silver. I had seen Mrs. Chalmers do this and knew that it was a habit of hers; and tonight there was no one else to do it.

"Ann," he said, coming close and looking around to make sure that there was no one else near, "Ann, I'm really sorry about what I said to that fellow, Morgan, this afternoon. Of course I didn't intend any aspersions upon his ability, but I suppose, according to their infernal ethics, it was—discourteous."

I picked up a soft flannel case and wrapped a handful of heavy forks in it. "Yes, I dare say he considered it so," I agreed.

"I've wondered what I can do to make amends,"

he continued. "Do you think I might double the amount of his fee?"

"No, no," I begged earnestly, a sudden sense of disgust at the thought of such a thing. "No, don't try to offer Alfred *money*."

Poor Richard! Was there nothing in the world he could do except trample upon people's feelings then offer to pay them to get in a good humor again? He had insulted Alfred, who was a hero, then suggested offering him money to wipe out the stain. He had neglected and offended me this miserable day—but he had given me a string of pearls!

CHAPTER XVI

THE IDES OF MARCH

LOVE'S second summer," was the name Mammy Lou bestowed on the troubled period of my engagement with Richard Chalmers which followed the portentous events chronicled in the last few chapters.

"A love affair ain't no different from a baby," she would say to me sometimes, as her quick eye saw that all was not going well, and her maternal pity for me caused her to forgive the disappointment I had given her in my choice of a lover. "It's bound to have some miz'ry as well as joy mixed along with it. Why, you can't no more make true love run smooth than you can play a 'juice harp' with false teeth."

True love! Oh the irony of the words! So many months have passed since the happenings that I last recorded that I can look back now and dispassionately dissect even the motives of many things

which transpired during that gilded year. For it proved to be only a gilded year, while I thought at the time that it was a golden one. And I can see, among many other strange and bewildering things, that at the moment I saw Alfred Morgan stand up and bravely defy Richard's selfish tyranny, the scales seemed to fall from my eyes and I knew then which was the false and which the true. That I did not act upon this knowledge and follow the dictates of my intuition, I afterward regretted more poignantly than it often befalls the lot of a girl to rue a guiltless deed.

On that November night when I stood in the dining-room and counted out and stored away the Chalmers' family silver while Richard stood by and suggested appeasing Alfred's outraged pride by a gift of money, I felt an almost overpowering desire to fly precipitately away from the great, gleaming house with its Midas-like master, who, as I remembered for the first time with a shudder, was also *my* master.

The storm without, which had broken so violently, at the hour of the equally violent storm within, and between those two strong and determined spirits, had spent its force during the afternoon, and when

the dreary night closed down there was a sharp wind from the east, and the rain changed into a driving sleet.

Out into this Alfred went, and I stood at the door with him as we said good-by, until the piercing wind blew in and brought with it a little shower of light sleet, which it scattered over the inlaid floor.

"I'll be in the city for a day or two next week," I said as he held out his hand and looked with a slight shiver out into the icy blackness through which he must pass. "I'll see you then."

For the moment I had forgotten that Alfred and I no longer saw each other when I was in the city. I had failed to remember the fact, and also the circumstances leading up to it.

"But I'm leaving for New York Saturday night," he said briefly, as he pulled a little closer the big storm collar of his heavy coat, and slipped on his long automobile gauntlets. He had left the city so hurriedly that he had not had time to exchange these for ordinary gloves. "—And I sail on the following Wednesday."

"Oh! So this is good-by then?"

"Yes—for all time, I suppose. You'll be married long before I get back."

We were standing alone at the door which led out to the driveway and there was a motor-car a few feet away puffing softly a warning to hurry; Richard was somewhere near, in the front part of the house—but I thought not of his anger if he should find me in such a plight; I did not stop to remember that Alfred was in danger of missing his train; above all I did not recall that only a few months before I had had the chance of making a decision which, if differently made, would have put such a different aspect upon the world's cold blackness this miserable night—I remembered nothing, except that Alfred was going away from me—and I had already seen my mistake. Giving way completely as this mighty knowledge came bearing down upon the tired, aching nerves of my brain, which had already been working at over-tension for the past many days, I covered my face with my hands and gave vent to the sobs and tears which seemed to have been gathering in my heart since I had last seen Alfred. Now he was going away, and I was to see him no more!

"Ann," he begged, as he quickly stripped off the long gauntlets and started to put out his hand, "*don't!* For God's sake don't cry! I've stood a lot to-day, but I'll swear I can't stand that."

"If you've stood a lot, don't you think that I have, too?" I demanded in a low voice, the convulsive little catches in my throat making speech difficult. I had lost all power of self-control for the moment, and I think that if Richard had come out into the hall at that instant and demanded an explanation I should have frankly given it. Many times through the succeeding months I regretted bitterly that he had not.

Alfred's hand started out toward me again at my passionate words, and caught mine this time, dragging them gently down from my face as he compelled my eyes to meet his.

"What do you mean?" he demanded. "Is he unkind to *you*, too?"

"Oh, no, not unkind," I stammered, half frightened at the sudden turn of our conversation. "Certainly not unkind. He is the soul of generosity—but we don't—get along well—together." I broke down weakly in my speech, for the sense of disloyalty was strong upon me, and I felt that it was almost as grave a crime to recount the faults of a lover as those of a husband.

But Alfred's face was very serious, and if my perfidy made any impress upon him it was lost in the mazes of a greater problem.

"That is what I've been afraid of," he said in almost the same tones he had used when he made a similar remark upon my telling him I cared for Richard. "I thought you would find that your natures are—incompatible."

"Incompatible? Oh, Alfred, if we marry we'll *fight!*" I sobbed, burying my face in my hands again, and forgetting the *lover* Alfred in the dear friend whom I could always go to with a trouble. And I would be willing to stake anything in life that, in that moment, he, too, had forgotten that he was my lover.

"Well, that is a very serious question, and one which you will have thoroughly to thresh out before it is too late," he said, his bright brown eyes anxious and troubled. He looked down upon me with infinite sympathy.

"And you are going away so soon—and for so long?"

"Well, if I were not going away I could no longer be a—a friend to you, Ann; for I am not capable of giving you unbiased advice, and that is what you need. It would be a great temptation to make capital for myself out of your troubles with—him; and I can't lower myself this way. So don't grieve over

my going away, and—take council with your mother and Mrs. Clayborne. I am not the one to advise you in this case.”

So he went out into the blackness!

From New York, the day he sailed, he wrote me a note saying that he could not leave without telling me some things which he could not honorably speak of while we were in Richard Chalmers' house that night; and those things were that his own feeling for me would never change; if years passed before I ever felt that I needed him I was to send for him just as confidently as I would to-day. No matter what decision I came to in regard to my marriage with Richard Chalmers he would never approach me again in the light of a lover until I sent for him, the note ran on; and, as I read this last I looked up and smiled into vacancy over the thought of how proud and high-minded he is. He gave me the address of a London hospital and said that if I cared to write to him at any time within the next few weeks the letter would reach him there.

But I did not write to him within the next few weeks.

On the morning after Alfred's departure from

Charlottesville I came down-stairs early and found Richard in the breakfast-room. He was smiling radiantly as he looked up and saw me; then he threw aside his morning paper and pulled up a chair close to the fire.

"Evelyn is doing splendidly; the political news is to my liking; there are fresh trout for breakfast, and—here's a rose for your hair, my lady-love," he said, holding out to me a perfect bud of pearly whiteness. A box of them had come on the early train from a friend of Evelyn's in the city, and Richard had purloined the most beautiful one for me.

The ground outside was white and there was the sharp little sound of sleet against the window-pane, but the breakfast-room was a scene of glowing cheer. A Japanese tea-service was on the table, and the trout, which Richard had been fortunate enough to secure from a passing fisherman that morning, was broiled to a most delicious brown and seemed to be enjoying its repose upon its bed of water-cress. A steaming pot of hot water was presently brought in and placed beside my plate, and the tea-ball was brought to me. I was to make the tea and Richard and I were to breakfast together.

"This strikes me as being a happy arrangement,"

he said, smiling what I had often called his "twenty-one-year-old smile," for when he wore it it was difficult for me to believe that he was as far advanced in the thirties as I knew him to be. "This looks quite married and home-like, doesn't it—Mrs. Chalmers?"

Richard seldom jested about our marriage, and he never, but this one time, made reference to the name which would be mine when we married. Such a jest on the morning before, when he had just come in from his trip and was the personification of gentlemanly grouch, would have made all the world radiant to me; but, as it was, I blushed painfully as he spoke the name—and he took the blush at its face value.

"Ah, madam, I see that the thought pleases you!" he kept on banteringly as my hand trembled a little over the tea-ball. "Perhaps this is my opportunity for pressing my suit—isn't that what they call it in novels? It smacks too much of the tailor shop to suit my taste, however.—But honestly, Ann, I do want us to make arrangements for our marriage the first minute this nomination business is over. What do you say, dear heart?"

Again, if the question had been asked yesterday

morning it would have made a startlingly different impression, but, as it was this morning, I parried.

"I say that we are two very selfish and thoughtless young people to be talking about such things while Evelyn is lying up-stairs so ill—and your mother in such distress, Richard," I answered.

"Well, we'll not say another word about it, if it troubles you, sweetheart," he said gently. Then after a moment he added: "I never expect to do anything to hurt you, even a little bit, again."

"You mean—?"

"I mean as I did yesterday—about Morgan, you know. Did you notice how I stayed clear away last night while you went to the door with him? But," resuming his tone of persiflage, "you were there an unreasonable time, it seems to me. Now, tell your rightful lord what you two cronies were talking about."

"About his trip," I said quickly, spilling a little tea upon the cloth and vigorously mopping it up with my napkin. "He's going to Europe next week."

"Well, he's a pretty decent chap, although he does look deucedly young to be cutting into people—don't you think so?" he asked, not that he really did think

so, for Alfred is quite old-looking for his years, but he thought it would place him in a better light—the way he acted yesterday.

“Oh, you’d like a bearded old surgeon who learned so much technique before the war that he hasn’t needed to learn any since,” I answered, and the breakfast-hour passed away with this kind of light, bantering talk.

From that day Richard set about being the most agreeable companion when we were together, and the most devoted lover when we were separated that it has ever been my lot to meet in fact or fiction. I left Charlotteville the next day and he followed me up to the city on the fourth day thereafter, as soon as the doctors pronounced Evelyn out of danger. I had not intended stopping over in the city any length of time, but I found Cousin Eunice in a state of despair over the progress, or lack of progress, of her new book.

“Do stay,” she begged, as I announced this intention to her, “at least until I get through with the proposal. It’s as hard to get your hero to propose nicely as it is to get the gathers of a sleeve to set right. There’s always either too much or too little in a given spot. And it’s so provoking, when I’m

right in the midst of such a delicate situation, to have Pearl call out to me from the foot of the steps: 'Mrs. Clayborne, here's a jepman at the do' want's to know if your husban's a householder and a freeholder.'

" 'Tell him yes, and a *slave-holder*,' I yell back at her; for any woman who really keeps house is a slave."

"What do 'jepmen' want to ask such fool questions for?" I asked wonderingly.

"To avoid election frauds. You see there is so much deviltry right now in politics that the law-enforcement faction is sending men around all over the city to find out every voter, and if he has the right to vote."

"Well, what good does it all do?"

"None; but it gives the poor, overworked housewives one more trip to the front door, in the course of the day.—Then there are agents selling non-rustible wired bust-forms. Pearl never knows what to say to them, either."

"Mercy, what should one say?" I demanded, thinking all of a sudden that maybe my task was going to be too large for me.

"Say anything that comes to your mind, just so

it's unfit for publication—nothing milder will do for them," she answered bitterly.

"And Waterloo doesn't give you any trouble while you're trying to work, does he?" I inquired.

"Happily no, for Grapefruit is his consolation and his joy. Never were there such ways of a nurse-maid with a man child. Never has anybody invented such tales and games—"

"And spitting contests," I interpolated.

"It's true she taught him that ugly habit," she responded with some dignity, "but all boys learn it sooner or later."

So I stayed and the book grew like a soap-bubble the first week. Then Pearl's brother got into that condition which is always described by our colored servants with much gusto and rolling of white eyeballs as "'bout ter die," and, whether he ever dies or not, is a matter that the housekeeper knows nothing of. But the servant always leaves, and she did in this case; and upon the Sunday morning thereafter the gas stove in the Clayborne home looked as if gangrene had set in on it. I had magnanimously insisted on doing the cooking; and I didn't know before that a gas stove had to be washed as often as a new-born baby.

Cousin Eunice came out of her cataleptic state on Sunday morning, for she is ashamed to write on the type-writer that day for fear Waterloo will tell it at Sunday-school—and she showed me how to dispose of the week-old egg-shells and concentrated soup cans which had accumulated amazingly around the fenders of the range.

“Oh, I think a literary ambition is an evil thing sometimes,” she said with a deep sigh, looking around at the house, which she declared was enough to give us all bubonic plague.

“It is—er, disheartening to have you shut up all the week in the little back room up-stairs,” Rufe admitted, fishing one of his best gloves out from behind the coal-box. “When you’re locked away up there the house looks as empty as a hotel bureau-drawer—and that’s the emptiest thing on earth.”

“I know it,” she answered, looking at him sympathetically. “—Besides, it’s wearing to have a book for ever in your mind. Inspiration is so uncertain—and so urgent. I’ve had it strike me while I was washing my hair; and it’s far from pleasant to have to dash the soap out of your eyes while you search all over the house for your note-book and pencil—and the water drips down all over the furniture.”

"It must be," Rufe agreed.

"And here lately I've grown so absent-minded that when I go down-town for a little shopping I have to dress with my memorandum in my mouth to keep from going off and forgetting it."

But on Monday morning genius was burning again, and I stayed through that week, but only in the capacity of a protection against interruptions. We got another cook, for Pearl's brother, like Charles II., was "an unconscionable time a-dying." Richard came every day and every night and was so attentive to the whole family that Rufe rather sarcastically asked one day: "Ann, is Chalmers courting you or me?"

Rufe's words meant little to me then, but later they kept recurring to my mind with a persistency that would make Banquo's ghost appear like a tame and laggard thing. Was Richard hoping to gain, through his friendship with me, the support of the *Times*? He knew that if Rufe's personal influence could not bring about an actual support of him in the coming campaign it would be a factor in having the paper judge his manipulations with a lenient eye.

And now this finally brings me up to that mis-

erable day the following spring, the Ides of March, it was, when the skies fell; and they never fell upon a more wretched, more humiliated, more bitterly disciplined young woman.

As I have said, Richard had made an ideal fiancé throughout the time which followed that miserable parting with Alfred, and I had occasion many times to wonder if, after all, I might not have been mistaken about the incompatibility of our natures. Besides, the fascination of the handsome, physical Richard Chalmers was still there; perhaps it was never so strongly and bitterly there as on the fifteenth of March that I have just mentioned.

As the winter wore away, Richard's visits down home here, in the country, had been much further apart, especially since the time for the actual political fight drew nearer; and, from this fact and from the newspapers' more volcanic outbursts, I knew that a gubernatorial contest was about to take place.

But I should never have known it from the man who was most concerned in the race, for, during all this time, Richard never confided one hope nor fear of his to me; and I see now that it was not because he "didn't want to bother my pretty little

head about such things," as he occasionally stated, with a fond smile, but because he judged me to be exactly of the same intellectual stripe as his mother and Evelyn. He thought that I would not have sense enough to understand the situation.

Richard had been out of town a good deal lately on business trips, and the meeting that morning in March, at Rufe's office, was in the nature of an accident. Richard had not known that I was in the city for a day's shopping, so when we accidentally ran across each other on the street, the *Times* building was the nearest place we might drop into for a little talk.

"Well, you are taking your campaign hard," I said, as I looked at him critically after Rufe had assured us that we might have the whole morning without interruption, in his own particular little den, as he was going to be out in town. Then Richard had asked him to give orders that we were not to be interrupted, as he particularly wished for a little talk with me.

"Ann, I've had enough to run any man crazy since I saw you last, dear," he said wearily, in answer to my comment on his looks. He dropped down into the nearest chair and put up one hand to

shade his eyes from the brilliant morning glare. "This political business is the most infernal—"

"What, Richard?"

He was looking steadily into my eyes, but at my question he looked away; then after a moment moved his chair over closer and caught up my left hand.

"I'm in a devil of a mess, love," he said after a little inward struggle—then with that charming directness of his he ventured—"I want you to promise to help me out."

"Of course I will," I readily agreed.

"Oh, that's not the kind of promise I want," he instantly objected. "Say it solemnly. Say, 'I'll promise to stick to you.'"

"Why, Richard, you make me fear that something is seriously wrong," I cried in sudden alarm, for my sense of oneness with him had grown so amazingly since those months between the time of my visit to Charlotteville and then, and I felt as entirely identified with his interests as if we were already married. His attitude toward me at the breakfast-table the morning after Alfred's departure was a key-note to the manner in which he strove every day after that to cement this relation; and I know now that this

was an immense factor in causing me to allow the engagement to exist through those days of doubt. I had always felt that an engagement was very nearly as binding as a marriage—and Richard had always exercised such a charming right of possession.

“Something is seriously wrong, ‘Ann,” he said gravely, and his eyes held mine in a sort of fascinated wonder; “and I expect you to stand by me.”

His manner was very grave; and he seemed to be in a serious doubt as to whether or not I would stand by him.

“Tell me about it,” I suggested as patiently as I could, for I was trembling with uneasy eagerness.

“Give me your hand and swear that you will stick to me.”

“Oh, sweetheart, I’ll stick to you if you’re a horse-thief,” I said, trying to force a laugh.

“Then listen! You know that I want to be governor of this state—”

I nodded my head.

“—And the temperance party is about to go back on me because they think that Major Blake and I are going to form a separate faction and leave out the liquor question.”

"Yes, I know."

"Well, that is just what we are going to do—to save the state from the Republicans."

"Well?"

"And Blake is going to work up the campaign *for me*—on the condition—"

My blood was pounding like fire through my veins, but I felt absolutely unable to move. I knew what he was going to say and my heart was pleading for mercy, but my lips were mute. They could not even move enough to say, "I know it all. Don't say the hideous words." Richard had grown painfully embarrassed, and he stammered awkwardly:

"—on the condition that I become his son-in-law."

Just what happened after this I do not know. I might sit here all night trying to recall his explanations and protestations, but I shall get through with it all as speedily as possible, for all I really remember about that terrible day is that I felt dreadfully ill—and *benumbed*. I listened in a sort of trance to his recital of how Berenice Blake had labored under an hallucination for some time that he cared for her; and she had learned to return the fancied affection; how very ill she was, so ill that when she came

home for Thanksgiving it was found that she would have to go right back to Denver—

“And you went as far as St. Louis with them—and brought me a string of pearls,” I said in a dazed fashion.

“Yes, I always think of you first—no matter where I am,” he answered, looking at me fondly. “And our love-affair will not even be suspended for very long,” he went on. “She can’t possibly live six months; and her father wants, above everything on earth, that she shall be happy for the little while that she has to live.”

“By marrying you.”

“By being engaged to me. I would *not* marry her—there is no necessity for that.”

“And you are asking me to release you?”

“I am *not*,” he said very firmly. “I am asking you to give me—a leave of absence.”

Some unknown power seemed to put the words into my mouth, for I was not conscious of any effort toward thinking.

“But I release you, Richard. I could not be—mixed up in that kind of thing.”

He sprang from his chair and caught me violently in his arms.

"That's just what you're not going to do. You are *mine*. You are going to stick to me."

"I said that I would stick to you if you were a horse-thief," I said slowly. "—But not—*this*."

"Oh, Ann, you are breaking my heart," he cried, as he caught me close to him and buried his head on my shoulder. "You can't mean to throw me over."

"You are kind to put it that way, Richard," I said.

"You are a sensible girl," he exclaimed suddenly as he raised his head and looked at me again. "You must listen to reason and do exactly as I tell you in this matter. Then all will be well. The affair will be nothing more than a make-believe between us all, for Major Blake knows that I do not love the poor, homely, half-dead creature; the betrothal will have no more feeling in it than a stage kiss. The only deception you will have to practise will be to announce your own engagement to some one else this week, so that—"

"This week? My own engagement? Richard, what do you mean?"

"I mean just this, my poor little girl," he began, his deep gray eyes full of tears, and his hands, as they held mine, trembling piteously, "—that if the

story gets noised abroad that I—I hate even to suggest such a thing, Ann, it is so far from truth, darling—but if the story gets noised abroad that I jilted you it will harm my prospects, as well as being a humiliation to you.”

“Oh, I see.”

“So I thought you might announce your engagement to some one else—of course, just for a pose, but—”

“But there isn’t any one else.”

His eyes glanced into mine for a moment, then sought the floor.

“I’ve thought of all that,” he said easily. “But you know that Alfred Morgan would—would—”

“Would let me use his name?”

“Oh, Ann, don’t look so queer and unnatural, dear; you frighten me! You’re not going to faint, nor—anything, are you?” he began, looking around helplessly.

“I’m not going to faint,” I assured him with a little smile that was forced up from somewhere in the depths of my misery. “But I’m not going to use Alfred’s—nor any other man’s name in the way you suggest.”

“It is only to save yourself humiliation, dear,” he

said, looking annoyed and relieved at the same time.

"Oh, I'll take the humiliation for my part," I said, but with no evidence of anger nor reproach. I was still stunned and benumbed. "I can stand the humiliation—but I hate a liar."

So it ended this way—that beautiful dream of mine; and I should not tell the truth if I pretended that I did not wish many times in the bitter weeks which followed to close my eyes to the cruel reality and dream again, even knowing all the while that it was a dream.

No, there was no sense of thankful relief that I had found my knight of the lion heart to be a poor-spirited, craven, selfish thing. Not then! At the time of the revelation and for many days following I gave myself up to a bitter, longing sorrow for the man whom I had created out of my own fancy and had named King Richard. I had made the image as entirely as ever Pygmalion made Galatea, and I had worshipped it. I had loved it so that if its coming to life could have been brought about through my giving up my own I should gladly have let it live. But it would not come to life, for it was nothing—it was a dream-creature. Even as such, its

image continued with me, and I sorrowed for it with such an aching, lonely hopelessness that more times than once during the spring months of that year I felt that it was not within my nature to keep up the struggle any longer. I must give it up and send for Richard to come back.

The pale blue of the flowers which came up and blossomed in thousands along the hillsides of the "garden" back of the village, and the deep blue of the April skies were both turned to gray this spring—the cold, piercing gray of his eyes. They had not been cold for me!

And then a little later there was the "humiliation" he had mentioned. Possibly he did what he could to make this as light as it might be made, for his engagement to Major Blake's daughter was not publicly announced until several weeks after I felt sure the understanding had been reached. But he could not ask her to keep the betrothal a secret, as he had asked me, for his capital must be quickly and surely made from its brief existence.

Taking a new lease on life from this sudden and mighty happiness of hers, the poor, dying creature came home from Colorado and set about a feverish enjoyment of the brief span of time which

was left her. There were crowded arrangements made for the wedding, which was announced for June—after the primaries were well over—and she had the satisfaction of having her full-length picture appear in all the prominent newspapers of the state, all bearing the legend that she was Mr. Richard Chalmers' fiancée. The sight of these pictures, homely as they were, was no consolation to me, for I had never been jealous of her. And now I felt an infinite pity.

I used often to think with a laugh of scorn of the man I had imagined Richard Chalmers to be, making love to the poor, ugly, emaciated thing, in hopes of gaining her father's political favor! For of course he had made love to her all along, just as he had to me, in the same beautiful language, and with the same beautiful smile—but he had not kissed her. I could fancy him telling her of his great admiration and his mighty respect, and how unworthy he was to touch the hem of her garment—when all the while he was thinking how ugly she was and what a risk there might be of his catching tuberculosis!

Poor girl! She was happy, though, for her little while, tagging around the country with her father and Richard, and watching him adoringly as he

made his pretty speeches to the enthusiastic crowds of constituents. But she played the game too quick and fast, and with such a studied disregard for consequences that it was no wonder the end came so soon. She spent the most uncertain, changeable weeks of the time which is ever an ominous one for consumptives in driving through long stretches of damp country roads, then sitting for hours in stuffy, ill-ventilated little assembly rooms, where the foul air did its deadly work for her. She contracted pneumonia and died; and Mr. Chalmers canceled all speaking dates for one week!

But she died still thinking her Richard was a lion-hearted king, so who can say that Fate was not kind to her?

That there was an aftermath to my own affair with Richard was almost inevitable, for only in books do such bubbles burst and vanish entirely, leaving nothing in their wake. But this is the true record of what happened that spring and summer, and undignified and inartistic enough these happenings oftentimes were. If Fate had wished to bring the matter to a beautiful and asthetic close she would never let Richard and me meet again in this world, for oh, those after-meetings are bitter dregs of ro-

mance! But we met again—on the night of his defeat, a strange chance meeting it was, for he was standing at the door of his headquarters hotel, which is just across the street from the *Times* building, trying to make way for his mother and Evelyn, when I passed with the Claybornes. Evelyn saw me and called out a surprised greeting, so I was forced to stop for a moment, while Rufe and Cousin Eunice, never missing me, continued threading their way slowly across the street.

Richard stood very pale and weary looking, with his hat in his hand, while I spoke to Mrs. Chalmers and Evelyn; then seeing that I had been left alone he gravely suggested that I could never make my way through the crowd by myself, so he sent his mother and sister up-stairs and constituted himself my temporary knight errant. His hand, which tightly clutched my arm, as we struggled on, was icy cold; and the lines around his eyes made him look decidedly middle-aged. Clearly he had already realized his defeat, although the returns were only beginning to be flashed before the eyes of the cheering throng.

He walked with me to the elevator of the *Times*

building, and the great mirror in the back of the car held our two images a moment as he lifted his hat and turned to leave me. The reflection held a wholesome lesson as I gazed for an instant upon the features of the handsome, blasé, middle-aged man, then glanced at myself in my short-sleeved white gown, with my rounded elbows showing youthfully. Yes, I was undeniably *young*; and I felt, even in the midst of my sorrow for him, a little thrill of satisfaction that it was so.

It was a week or two after his defeat that Richard began a renewal of his lover-like attitude toward me, calling me on the telephone and asking permission to come, and again bombarding the express office with boxes of candy and flowers. When I gave abnormally polite refusals to these requests he would usually acquiesce with his half amused smile, which I could see just as plainly as if only a few feet lay between us, instead of many miles.

"You are a stubborn little vixen," he would say sometimes. "How long do you expect to keep this up?"

And if he had studied the matter over carefully and tried to hit on a means of curing me of my

fancy for him he could never have found anything more effectual than this. Then one day in the early autumn when all the world was dreary and the state was so evidently going Republican that no doubt he had cause for his odd temper, Richard called me again and asked that a meeting might be arranged, either at home or in the city. I began giving my usual reasons for not seeing him, when he cut me short with quick impatience.

"Oh, that's all right, if you don't want to see me," he said harshly, his rich drawl entirely obliterated in the sudden anger which tinted his speech. "And I'll promise never to give you the chance again of turning me down. But, my dear Ann, you must remember there was a time when I didn't have to *beg* you for every little favor I got."

"There was a time!" Ungenerous, despicable as this was, coming from Richard, I took it with a sort of calmness born of the knowledge that it was only what I deserved. For I don't believe that a woman ever acts a fool over a man but that she lives to have the unwholesome fact cast up to her while she is drinking the dregs of her folly. "There was a time," the man is always ready to remind her, oft-

times hoping to use this memory as a lever to remove the aftergrowth of indifference or positive hatred.

In this case the words caused me to feel something very nearly akin to hatred for Richard, and I quickly ran away up-stairs, where I threw myself across my bed and gave way to the storm of tears which had been brought on by the angry selfishness of his act. But tears, while they are bitter and scalding, are also *cleansing*, and they acted that day as a purifying flood which washed my soul clean from all thoughts of Richard Chalmers. When, late in the afternoon of that rainy day, I arose from my bed I was weak from weeping, and unutterably saddened over this final, ugly blow which Reality had dealt the fragments of my house which was built upon the sands; but, weak and sad and world-wise, as I felt myself to be, there was a great joy singing in my heart, for I knew, for the first time, I *knew* that I was free.

The next day I wrote a letter to Jean asking her to get me several boxes of the latest style gold-edged note paper with my monogram embossed thereon, and insisted that she have the stationer hurry the

order through. "I want the very newest and most exquisite style you can find," I wrote her, "for I am about to begin a most particular correspondence and if you will take pity upon my loneliness enough to run down any time within the next few weeks I'll tell you the name of my distant correspondent. Yet, for fear you will not be able to get here before your curiosity consumes you, I'll let you into the secret enough to satisfy you that the gentleman is a 'medicine man' and he is now wandering on a foreign strand. And if you should hear that I have done such an unladylike thing as to *send* for him, you will know in your heart that it is not entirely on account of father's rheumatism and Mammy Lou's still threatening right side.

"But come, dear Jean, if you love me, for I am very lonesome, with absolutely nobody but Neva and her mother to divert my mind."

Poor little Neva! I must not wind up this chapter without some little word about her, for there is going to be only one more chapter after this, and there will be no room for Neva in that. This final word may be written next week—it may not be written until a whole year has passed, but when-

ever it is it will be the last, for I know that if Mammy Lou's definition of the period is correct it will wind up the age of Eve.

But Neva! We left her a lovelorn lass grieving over the perfidies of Hiram, the fickle. We find her again a college girl, breathing academic atmosphere from the tassel of her mortar-board down to the rubber heel of her "gym" shoes. She cares for nothing but school, and the sororities therein. She knows all the places up in the city where one is most likely to come across the college boys one desires most to see; and the class of ices that take the longest time to consume while one is sitting watching these boys pass by. She sometimes does not know the name of a certain desirable young man, but she always knows the name of his high-sounding Greek letter brotherhood.

"She don't talk about nothing but 'frats' and 'spats' and things like that," her mother one time complained after a brief visit from Neva. "And she calls some of her mates by the curiourest names I ever heard. There's one she likes a good deal that she says is a *new Phi Chi*; and another one that she has to look to some because she's a '*old Tau*!'"

"The stage has to be passed through," mother said to Mrs. Sullivan comfortingly, "for it's as certain and as harmless as chicken-pox."

But Mammy Lou takes a much more serious view of Neva's collegiate career and high-flown talk.

"Education ain't no good for girls," she often declares emphatically, "for it spoils their powers of emmanuel labor. You can just as shore count on a educated girl makin' a lazy wife as you can count on damp weather makin' a baby's hair curl an' a ol' woman's feet hurt!"

CHAPTER XVII

MAY DAY

“ ‘**F**OR lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land.’ ”

I quoted this bit of classic loveliness softly as I looked out this morning very early from my bedroom window and feasted upon the scene of sweet spring beauty which was everywhere spread before my eyes. Yet the cause of the verse coming to my mind at the moment was due much more to the feeling in my heart than to the scenery all about me, although each seemed a reflection of the other.

“How many years ago to-day was it that we looked down into the old well in the lot and tried to see our future husband’s face?” Jean inquired with a wistful little smile as she came over to the window and dropped her chin on my shoulder, peering out upon the fresh green landscape. One of

her arms slipped affectionately around me, while with the other hand she toyed with the fresh white curtain at the window. It was upon this hand that there gleamed the ring which Guilford had at last persuaded her to let him place there.

"More years than we are proud to own, considering that we are still spinsters," I answered lightly and a little at random, for my thoughts were wandering, though I am glad to state that they did not have such a long journey to travel now as formerly. Each of my foreign letters lately has borne a postmark a little nearer home.

"I'm not going to be a spinster long, thank you," she responded quickly, holding her left hand close to her face so that she could catch some of the myriads of tiny rainbows in her eyes. "And I don't any longer need to look down into an old well upon this magic day to catch a glimpse of my future husband's face."

"Still—let's do it again to-day!"

"All right," she agreed readily, smiling at the enthusiasm of my eyes. "I'm in for anything that will take us out into this glorious sunshine."

Throughout the course of the morning we managed to dig out from ancient trunks of debris two

white sunbonnets which Mammy Lou graciously freshened for us, plying her "raw starch" and sound advice with equal vigor during the task. We accepted the bonnets and admonitions gratefully, and donning short skirts and low-collared blouses we prepared for a tramp through the woods before the hour for the phenomenon in the well.

We had skirted around back of the orchard fence and had found an ideal resting-place under a clump of softly green sweet-gum trees, where we might sit in the delicate shade and read the magazines we had brought with us, when there was the sharp, piercing whistle of the eleven o'clock train as it sped close by our secluded little nook and drew up pantingly a few moments afterward at the village station.

"Doesn't that whistle sound *close* on these clear, still mornings?" Jean remarked with a little start, as she looked up from her magazine and watched the column of smoke mount into the sunny, blue sky.

"Close, and decidedly cheerful, I always think," I answered, allowing my eyes also to wander after the smoke up into the dizzy heights. "You city people can't realize what the coming of the trains mean to us who are tucked away in the little country towns. Our first thought always is, 'Is there a letter

on that train for me?" Or, rather, that is my first thought always. It's a pity we're dressed this way or we might walk down to the post-office and see. The whistle sounded so unusually musical this morning that there may be a very important one. The last one I had was from Liverpool—there ought to be one very soon from New York!"

"But the old well!" Jean cried in sudden alarm, for she is a sadly sentimental creature and would not have missed the little superstitious performance this morning for several letters—bearing *my* name and address. "We are not going to give that up now."

"Well, we would better be moving upon the field of operation then," I suggested, closing my book and starting to my feet. "That train wanders into the village at any hour which suits it best, so there's no telling just what time of the beautiful May morning it is. Let's hurry on down to the lot so that we shall be on the spot when the first twelve o'clock whistle blows."

We hurried back in the direction of home, taking a short cut which led us through one end of the orchard and soon landed us beside the clump of ancient lilac bushes which form a kind of hedge along

the barbed wire fence of the disused horse lot. In the center of this is the well, the uncovered frame top of which affords an excellent opportunity for this old-fashioned May-day indulgence.

We rested a bit in the shade of the tall lilac hedge, but the noon-day whistles soon sounded and we scampered over to the well and laughingly peered in. There was nothing to be seen in its gloomy depths, but the day was so beautiful and we were so absurdly lighthearted over the divine order of all things in nature that we refrained from making any sarcastic remarks on our grown-up sophistication.

"I don't see Guilford's face down there, but I'm glad we came out to look for it; for the walk has made me ravenously hungry," Jean said, as we straightened up and pushed our white bonnets back from over our eyes.

"Then let's hurry on to the house, for I am starving, too—and I know that there are delicious things for dinner. Mammy Lou made me promise to get back in time to make the salad. There are tomatoes for it and the loveliest young lettuce you ever saw, with tiny, slender onions—not a bit bigger than my little finger. I can't bear them when they grow bigger—"

"Ann, hush! Let's don't waste time talking."

We hurried up through the side yard, and as we approached the house there were signs of an unwonted stirring in the vicinity of the dining-room and kitchen. My spirits fell at the sight and I intentionally slackened my steps.

"Unexpected company to dinner," I announced dismally to Jean, as I saw mother flutter excitedly across the back porch, followed by Dilsey bearing a big bowl of strawberries to set in the refrigerator. Just then mother caught sight of us coming leisurely up the walk and she made a spasmodic motion for us to hurry.

"Go on up-stairs and dress," she said in a stagy voice when we had come within earshot. "Dress *beautifully*."

"Why, what on earth—" I started to ask, when I saw the transfigured face of Mammy Lou at the kitchen door. "Some august company to dinner?"

"'Tain't dinner! It's luncheon," she replied grandly, "in *courses*. And the chil'ren o' Israel lookin' into Canaan and seein' the bunch o' grapes that it took two men to carry ain't saw nothin' compared with what I've saw this day."

"Good gracious! Who *is* here?" I demanded, much more impressed by her calling the meal "lunch-eon" than by the weightiness of her Biblical allusion.

"Is there but *one* man on earth I'd turn the name o' my vittles up-side-down'ards for?" she questioned meaningly, gazing upon me with a beatific glow. "—And he's the grandest that the Lord ever made and put on earth to be pestered with poll-taxes."

"*Alfred!*" I cried, a sudden burst of understanding and joy sweeping over me; and leaving me very weak-feeling and happy. "Alfred is coming!"

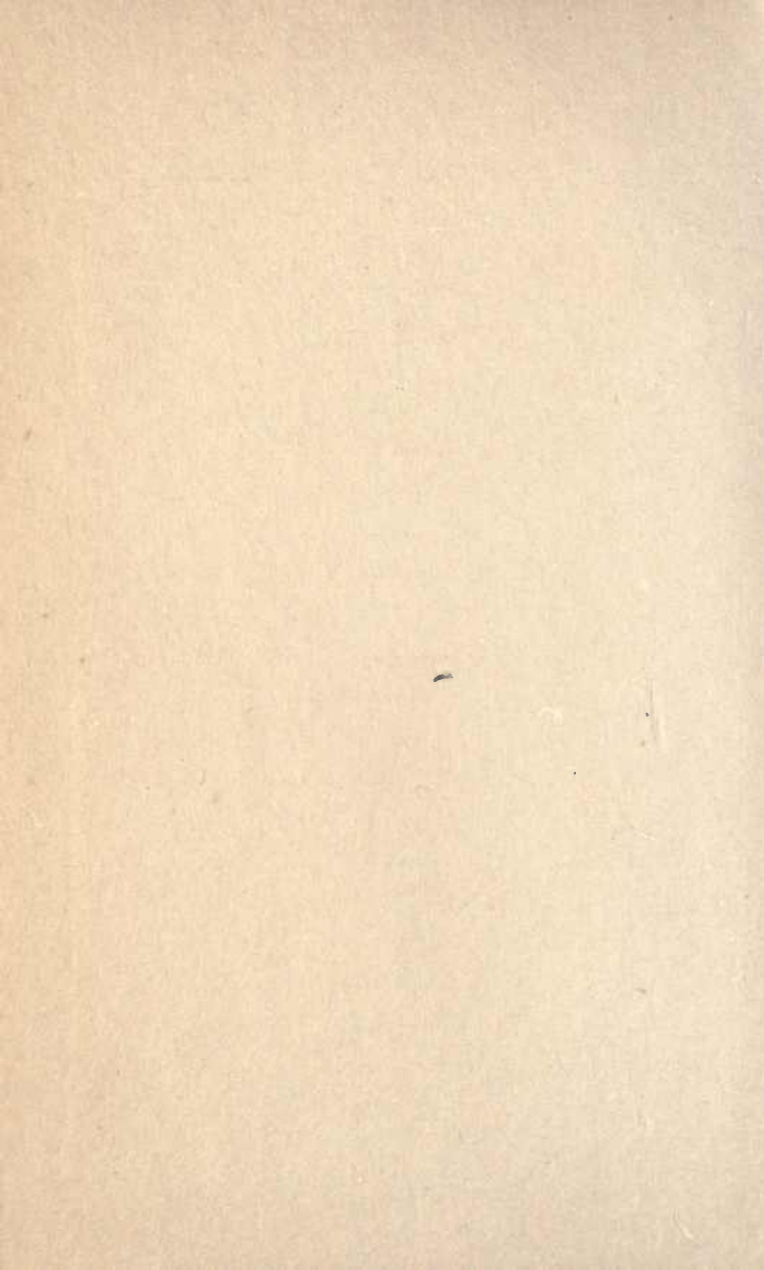
"Not coming, but already here," I heard his voice saying close behind me. His voice! It seemed a thousand years since I heard it last; and I knew in that moment that I could listen to it for a thousand years without ever once growing tired.—But as I turned and faced the big, bearded man coming through the hall doorway, the quick color flew to my face and I felt suddenly very small and insignificant. For it seemed in that instant that Alfred had grown into a giant, a great, bearded giant, over seas—and I have always had such an admiration for giants.

"Well, have I stayed away long enough?" he demanded, as he came on the porch and took my hand. Mother and Jean had fled, but Mammy Lou steadfastly held her ground. "Are you glad to see me, Ann?"

"Yes—yes," I stammered in a mighty confusion.


"How glad? How glad, *darling?*" His brown eyes were deep and grave.—But the afternoon wore away and the spring twilight had fallen before I answered that question.

THE END



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